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A Novel of West Africa

M. F. C. ROEBUCK

MACDONALD : LONDON

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C O N T E N T S

PART		PAGE
1	<i>The Village in the Hills</i>	1
2	<i>The Time of Dreams</i>	47
3	<i>The Time of Suffering</i>	91
4	<i>The Time of Hope</i>	135
5	<i>The Time of Violence</i>	171
6	<i>The Time of Fulfilment</i>	233

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PART I



The Village in the Hills

❧ I ❧

It was mid-morning, a bright, cloudless morning, suffused with heat, but a pleasant heat that menaced but never consumed. A pallidly splendid sun moved majestically to the zenith of a pale blue, rain-washed sky, poised above a drenched green earth. Elsewhere, the time of the year was the close of the calendar half-year. Here it was the close of the third season, the third of the five seasons. The rains were drawing to a close. Ahead, on the eastern horizon, lay an opaque haze. It contained a threat which the late afternoon sun might bring to fulfilment, when the wide plains would crouch beneath the sudden onslaught of the rain. But now the plains were at peace and unafraid, glorious, green, sweeping plains, the short grass thick and vigorous. Noisy little watercourses chattered their way in brimming, important threads, forgetful that in the dry season they would shrink and dwindle into nothingness. Here and there were clusters of thorn bushes and twisted euphorbias, dwarfed beside the tall stateliness of borassus palms, foliage spread out luxuriantly against the background of pale sky.

Somewhere away to the right, lost below the horizon, lay the sea, angry blue surf rearing up into white foam and thundering down upon long white beaches. Fringing the sea lay the lagoons, vast sheets of dimpling water, the shores surging with the busy life of fishermen. Other lagoons too, tiny and scarcely disturbed, lying bowered in fields of 'be', the tall, strong, thatching grass, or groves of 'fotigba', little, stunted trees, stems hard in defiance of the salt air, and tangled branches throwing off stiff leaves.

On the left the horizon was close, brought close by the hills, solid, green, folding masses in a purple haze.

Somewhere, far ahead, lay the forested mountains and there too lay the deep gorge of the great river. But meanwhile, left,

right, and ahead stretched the green plains, untroubled and beautiful in the warm light.

The road was an interloper, a grey ribbon of road, stretched taut and straight and tense through the green glory. The bus was even more of an interloper, a neat Mercedes bus, bright blue, capering along the road with purposeful zest. The roof rack, piled frighteningly high with assorted packages and bundles, glinted gaily as the chromium bars caught the dancing light. Chromium lines framed the windows. Front and back, in gleaming white paint, the bus bore the legend, 'God Help You Boy'.

There was contrast here, and perhaps a lesson to be learned from the contrast. Two widely differing influences. The ageless quietude of forest and mountain, sea and plain. The urgent summons of aggressive, thrusting road, in determined partnership with the capering bus. Unconsciously Paul responded to both these influences. To a certain extent he was aware of them. It was right that he should be aware, for both of them had helped to form him, and both of them were still forming him. He sat on the last seat of the bus, wedged against the window by the ample person of the trading woman at his side, and his eyes rested unseeingly on his fellow-passengers.

A stranger's eyes would have brightened with interest, for here were exotic colour and splendid variety all crammed together into one small bus. Women, gracefully attired in the local costume. A length of brightly printed cloth, browns and blues and golds, wound closely round the waist, dropped to the ankles in swaying lines. The upper garment was a simply cut bodice moulded from shoulder to waist, from where it fell in a brief over-skirt of wide pleats. The short sleeves were little cascades of cloth. Women in more modern clothes, neat, short dresses, cream, blue, with neat, narrow belts at the waists, lithe waists. Little girls in short, sleeveless, shapeless tunics, red and green. But to the male the tunic really appertained, grey and long and graceful over baggy Mohammedan trousers; or knee-length, heavily gathered at the shoulders, in blue and white stripes, falling in many folds over white, drill trousers, or brightly-coloured knee-length shorts, or dark, cotton slacks.

There were men who wore the kente, the long, wide cloth of

hundreds of woven squares of intricate pattern in varied colour, worn toga-like across the body and over one shoulder. Sometimes this arrangement displayed the short sleeve of a plain country tunic, sometimes merely a naked arm.

There was influence here too, in the colour and variety, but of this Paul was not aware. For it was too close to him, too much an accepted part of his life. People he noticed, one might say, only in masses, particularly he had noticed them in the time he spent in London, for there they moved in masses, great wedges of hurrying masses of young-old men and old-young men in dark, dull suits, of older women in neat, buttoned-down coats, and younger women with wide, short skirts and slashes of lipstick. Occasionally he wondered why progress could bring such cramped, mesmerized dullness in its wake.

So here he did not notice the variety. At the moment he was aware instead of the one thing common to all his fellow-passengers—they were all going to a definite destination, each one's journey had a purpose, a goal. But he, so his mind whispered, he was going nowhere. His was not a journey, it was a retreat, a retreat from disaster. He felt suddenly malevolent, but underneath the malevolence lurked a composite feeling in which envy, bitterness and bewilderment all found a place. His mind continued whispering. His effective working life was stopped, his career was ended.

Which may seem an odd point in a man's life, to commence his story, but it would be a bold prophet who would foretell what part of a man's life would constitute his real story. That can only be seen, and then only sometimes, at the end. So this point will do as well as any other.

Ahead the Shai Hills disturbed the flatness of the plains. Two peaks rose up, Mlayu, only a thousand feet or so, but by contrast with the flatness it seemed of greater stature, holding its solitary head boldly against the sky. Its smaller brother, Mampong, crouched down as though aghast at its own temerity in being there at all. Paul's eyes rested on them briefly but his inward vision prevailed again. He was seeing the village to which he was returning, seeing it with the eyes of childhood. Only two or three visits in the last fifteen years and those brief. There had been a few changes of course but they had held no interest for

THE VILLAGE IN THE HILLS

him. So it was the childhood vision that returned, a long, sun-baked brown road, with clusters of houses on either side, some sturdy, brick structures interspersed with the old, mud-walled dwellings. And a bright-eyed urchin in uniform of khaki drill shirt and shorts, trotting along the road, a little pile of books balanced securely on his head. That was Paul, and he eyed the passing peasant-farmers as they trudged to the lands, and the weight of the books on his head grew light. They were the magic key that opened the gate of release from land-tied labour. One day he would be a village bigman.

That was the lower primary stage.

Then he was taller, and the pile of books was a little higher and heavier, and he went down to the valley to school, to the missionary middle-school. Now he thought of things beyond the village; he would go to the world of cities, study for a profession, become one of the lounge-suited gentlemen who sometimes drove through the valley in cars. But to say that he had a consuming desire would be far from the truth. His nature was too carefree and buoyant to permit of obsessions; the standards of gravity and courtesy expected of a boy of his age were too high to permit an engrossing absorption in self-centred interests. Rather was he driven on by a certain impatience with unnecessary primitiveness, by an unusual supply of energy, and by an even more unusual supply of curiosity, curiosity to see beyond the village in the hills, beyond the valley below, beyond—this was after he entered secondary school in the capital—the line of sea that leaped and thundered on the white sands.

He was spoken of as talented, promising, even brilliant. But at this word, although he smiled with naïve pleasure, a streak of caution asserted itself. He was not brilliant, not like some of his fellow-scholars, who seemed to have photographic memories of pages of textbooks, not like some who could grasp firmly the solution of a problem without an initial period of bewilderment. True, he had what he called 'bright moments', but he followed them up with dogged tenacity and it was this rather than any unusual powers of intellect that accounted for scholastic successes. Though it did not occur to him, this in itself was a quality that set him apart from his fellows. They geared their characters to their mental capacity, he geared his brain to

his will, and his will could develop quite surprising horse-power. But why continue this fierce generative effort in pursuit of any profession in which he was not really interested? Why fill the very corners of one's brain with layer after layer of arid fact? What he wanted to do was to leap into the great ocean of life itself, to fight its currents and breast its waves, to swim out from this backwater that was his homeland into the surging oceans of other peoples, peoples more developed, more sophisticated than his own.

He turned down the inevitable university bursary. Instead he asked for specific studies at a polytechnic institute, studies that would help him to a career in journalism; later he asked for a training post on the staff of a great London daily. It was all arranged for him. He was not only bright, he was born at the right time. He was thrown high by the rising tide of African nationalism, borne up by the waves of British anxiety to prepare for the inevitable day ahead, anxiety to select good material for the leadership of developing countries and to thrust into that material all the education and training and sophistication which it could absorb. And more. For what it couldn't absorb could be left to decorate the surface. They were cynical, these British. But that was a later thought. He didn't think so at the time. He was grateful and happy and keen.

He was a success at his chosen career. The bus interior was lost behind a vision of a busy newsroom, sometimes frantically busy with cabled information flashing through it like electric currents. The plains vanished into a grey London fog and he was setting out on his first real assignment as a cub-reporter. There were other assignments, plenty of others, his life became tumultuously busy. They liked his work. Sometimes they were startled by it, sometimes they frowned over something they called flamboyancy. But he had the gift of words. They admitted that. They liked the strange little twists he could give to the tail of a paragraph so that everything in it suddenly fell into a different perspective altogether. Most of all they remarked on his gift of patience and his ability to work undisturbed in the midst of appalling distractions. He remembered Rudy thumping him on the back. 'God, Paul, you turn the old inspiration on and off like a tap. You black chaps have no nervous systems at all'.

In those days he didn't mind the word 'black'. Later he did. He grew sick and tired of it. He didn't mind if people liked or disliked him for the same reasons as they liked or disliked other people. But why this perpetual harping on his colour? Half-insulting jibes from bus conductors and restaurant attendants were bad enough. Often they were preferable to the sickening attentions of people who worked at a strange profession of their own. 'Professional Friends of Africa' was how he described them to himself. He doubted their sincerity. Sincere friends would help with the uprooting of habits and customs that were primitive and unedifying, not look upon them with beaming, vacant tolerance. They leaned over backwards, he commented to himself, to avoid seeing obvious national faults. They were boring types.

There were bad types too, like the elegant London lawyer who lived on the proceeds of several houses devoted to quite a different profession and who thought he could entice Paul into a place as 'agent' for his 'establishment'. Paul had a sudden sharp memory of the beautifully manicured hands, the thin lips drawn back from white teeth in a half-smile, half-sneer. 'But my dear chap. I have quite a few negroes. Besides, I thought all you black men were seething masses of lust.' Paul's face was an inscrutable mask. Perhaps some of them were. He said calmly, 'Now you have met an exception.' Outside on the pavement, he spat, as Africans do, through his teeth in a wide splash. It was something he hadn't done since boyhood. He felt better. He felt numbed too, almost as though he had experienced a physical blow. Unconsciously he had held a belief. Vice, such as he had encountered it at home, was due to poverty, primitiveness, and ignorance. With progress and learning, it would vanish. Material development developed better, finer people. He gave a short laugh at his own naïveté. It ended on a nervous note. Vice was revealed as a power everywhere, a power dominating learning, development, cleanliness, sophistication. For a moment he regretted that refused university bursary. Maybe he could have followed other studies, Philosophy, Ethics. Maybe they would have thrown some light on the strange shadows he was for ever encountering in human nature, so that he could have gazed out to see what lay beyond the villages and the valleys of the

human brain, his own included, particularly his own. But these thoughts did not last for long. There was too much to do, to see, to enjoy.

There were bad types, there were boring types, but there were good types too. Rudy was a good type. He introduced Paul, albeit half-unwillingly, to a post on an exciting new paper. It was very sensational and left-wing. Rudy was uncertain; he thought perhaps it overdid it a bit. But Paul didn't feel any fears. Left-wing and sensational were the two traits he felt attuned to at the time. He was a success again. They said his style was just what they wanted, and from someone who could talk from the inside, as they put it. He sub-edited every column, every line on West Africa, mostly sent in by white journalists stationed there. He knew as if by some instinct where to clip out a sentence, where to add an embellishing detail. That was because he could visualize the scenes and events described even more clearly than the white journalists who had been eyewitnesses.

It was natural that he should take an interest in reports from other parts of Africa, and gradually he began to build up a vivid mental image of the vast, stirring continent, began to realize that the word 'African', applied so glibly to every one of the thousand and one varieties in development, outlook, character and custom, was almost meaningless, even more meaningless than the word 'European' would be to describe and distinguish the astonishing variety of the peoples of Europe. But a conviction was growing in him, and he said often, 'My own people are the most forward-looking people in Africa'. It was a remark based on more than natural bias.

Gradually the flamboyancy became acrid and acid. He hardly noticed it himself, at least at first. Each clumsy insult, each fawning imbecility put another drop of vitriol into the inkwell. Almost imperceptibly he was transformed from a rather unthinkingly carefree young unit in a united Empire into a fanatical patriot burning to help his country shake off the bonds of colonialism and to stride out into the future, a free people, the leader of other newly-free peoples.

Post-war London was not the easiest of places for a young mind to mature. He suffered more stresses than he was prepared

for. The West Indians were arriving in force, bringing strange ways and lower standards, creating new slum areas. The Londoners were in the first wave of a somewhat petulant reaction. Their age-old antipathy to foreigners was aroused, and these foreigners, by their colour, were too easily identifiable. They were sprawling all over the country, ruining it. Antipathy began to extend beyond the West Indians to anyone with a dark skin.

The vitriol was swamping the ink now. These British, who had sprawled over half the world, who were still sprawling over his own country. Angered, filled with a desire to be of constructive assistance to his own people, he left Britain and went home, home to play his part in the struggle, home to a capital that seethed like a boiling cauldron. Every now and then the lid would lift from sheer inner pressure, with explosive hissing and steaming. One of these outbursts resulted, for him, in a three-month stay in gaol. Oddly, he emerged less bitter, more truly constructive, with a finer, soberer edge to his patriotism. The old lion was not dead. He could still turn and nip a cub. What he could do, others could do. Paul felt he had learned an important lesson. One's opponents also think. It is wise not to underestimate them.

Even the exhilarating Day of Independence appeared not at all as an end, but very much as a beginning. A free people now; but a lone people too, lone in the midst of intersecting hostilities that they barely comprehended. Good-natured, naïve, uncomplicated, and alone. For leadership the many must look to the very few. On their shoulders rested a tremendous responsibility. That was how he viewed the picture. He was prepared to bear his share of the burden, eager to bear it. He became filled with a sense of mission. Then suddenly, bewilderingly, he was in gaol again, this time at the hands of his own people.

The shock came over him again, now, as he sat in the bus; the shock, the frustration, the bitterness combined; they swept over him again, like a physical vibration. He closed his eyes the better to repel the onslaught.

The market-mammie at his side stirred, and began clutching her parcels together. She said to Paul, as if in explanation, 'We shall reach the bridge soon'.

The plains gave way to gentle undulations, soon rising into hills. The height of Krobo towered up ahead. Then it lay behind, and the merry little blue bus danced its way along the winding lines of the road that had lost its tautness and now curved gently in and out of the hills, hills that turned into mountains, massive guardians of the gorge, wonderfully clothed in garments of densely-spaced trees. Suddenly, against the dark background of climbing trees, there was a glimmer of dancing light, an ethereal half-circle of gleaming, silvery light, as if a lovely, fragile, wonderfully symmetrical spider's web had been thrown up into the air, to float casually against the background of the forested mountain. Paul leaned forward with live eagerness. The Volta-Adomi bridge. In a moment it was lost again behind a shoulder of mountain. 'God Help You Boy' twisted and twirled, skipped down a long incline and pulled up abruptly in the midst of a tumultuous village of people, and goats and trading stalls, dominated by petrol pumps. Beyond, close at hand now, the spider's web gleamed down, impassively beautiful.

The bus was emptied, loudly and completely, of all but Paul. He looked in surprise at the driver as the latter tapped at his window, calling out, 'This is where we stop, friend'. Paul said indignantly, 'But I paid to go to Azikuma'. 'O.K.! O.K.!' said the driver. 'My brother will take you on. His bus is waiting at the other side of the river. You'll have to walk across the bridge.' Paul clambered out. He said, crossly, 'The bridge cracking or something?' The driver winked slowly. He said, 'Where've you been lately, friend? They charge a toll to cross the bridge now. Anything from four bob to ten bob depending on the size of the vehicle. So I don't cross. The passengers cross, on foot. They haven't got round to charging them yet. When they do, I guess they'll swim.' He laughed and winked again. A little group had gathered, staring. Paul said slowly, rather indignantly, 'Tolls are revenue. How can a country develop without revenue?' The driver's expression changed to one of insolence. He said, 'Those that want civilization can pay for it, friend. As for me, I can't afford it, not at five bob a crossing.' The listening group laughed. This was a form of blunt wisdom that they appreciated. Paul moved on hastily. Foolish to start any discussion and the prison smell still fresh upon him. He

stopped, to call back to the driver. 'How will I know your brother's bus?' The driver bore no ill-will for the implied reproof about the toll. He slapped his hand against the blue vehicle and called back, 'Like this one, but green. He's got a sign painted, 'Hiya Baby'. You'll find it.'

Paul stepped on to the roadway that led across the bridge. On either side of him the gleaming steel swept away into the air, curving majestically, to drop down to the opposite bank. A toll office housed a toll collector and a policeman. On each side of it stretched out a long barrier to halt the traffic in either direction. For a moment Paul was aware again of these two contrasting influences—the ageless, sliding river that whispered to a man to sit and dream, and the gleaming, functional bridge that summoned urgently to a life of development, progress, action. But before the bridge there stretched symbolically the barrier; the toll, revenue, money.

He edged round the barrier in the wake of other pedestrians and walked slowly across the long bridge, gazing downstream at the mighty pool that the Volta formed at this point, the surging, shining water splashing the wooded shores, swirling around a lovely central island where the tall trees wore long festoons of creepers. Upstream the mountains towered and from amidst the folds the river seemed to leap into existence from nowhere.

But somewhere up there, somewhere out of sight, lay the site of the proposed dam, the dam that would bar the way of the Volta and harness its great power. At the thought he felt again that live eagerness. It died away in a surge of bitterness.

'Hiya Baby' was parked on the other side of the bridge. The driver accepted Paul's ticket without argument, but intimated that he was waiting for a full complement before setting off. He returned to a somnolent position on the grass alongside the parked bus. Paul strolled back to the bridge and gazed down at the river. But he was not seeing the shining water now. He was back in the early hours of the morning—this very morning—emerging from the doors of the gaol. Completely unexpected. He had been detained for nearly two years. Why were they now releasing him? He felt a ridiculous desire to argue about it. The police officer was crisp. He waved a large, black hand. He

said, 'You were imprisoned. Now you are released. Don't trifle with your luck. Go, man, go!' He emerged into the air of freedom once more. His sports jacket, he noticed, hung a little loosely on him. He must have lost weight in prison. He hitched the side belts of his slacks a little tighter. Nevertheless he looked neat, as always. That was one of his gifts too. He smiled a little grimly. He was a long way from being crushed. His natural buoyancy obviated the need for a conscious reaching inward for courage which a more sensitive nature would have required.

The capital was tumultuously alive even early in the morning. The pavements were crowded with talking, whistling, even singing pedestrians. The streets were a roaring mass of traffic, motor hooters blaring, honking, screaming. In and out of lines of less wilful vehicles dashed flashes of bright yellow. The mudguards of Accra taxis, uniformly painted in conformity with regulations, whatever the main colour of the body. Grey and yellow, blue and yellow, red and yellow, they leaped and weaved and throbbed their way like noisy, agitated locusts leaping in a burning, wind-tossed field.

In a wayside bar he drank some strong coffee and ate a couple of rich, round, syrupy cakes. The release had been too sudden, too unexpected. He hadn't a plan in his head. Then he remembered Mercy Onyina who had taken charge of all his personal possessions when he was detained. All. Not so many at that. Still, collecting a change of clothing was as good a way to start life again as any other.

Mercy herself opened the door. She said, 'Paul', in complete surprise and for a moment they stood staring at each other. There was no display of emotion at all. For one thing the bond between them had not been strong. They had been friends, moving in the same set, working, bar-trotting, high-living. That's what friends were for. For another, displays of emotion are intended to rouse that emotion. If it is already roused, weak or strong, the display is unnecessary. So they waited passively for the moment to pass. Paul said, 'Hullo Mercy. I've been released. I thought I'd fetch a change of outfit.' 'Of course, Paul.' He followed her down the passage. Her feet were in high-heeled slippers, with gay feathers spread out fanwise over the foot from the toe. She wore a short negligée of bright yellow silk. Her hair,

which had long since yielded to the hair-straightener's ministrations, was swept into deep, lacquered waves, with a golden streak over the left temple. She looked exotic and birdlike. He half expected her to break into chirruping song.

She led him into what was obviously a little-used spare room and gestured towards a large cupboard. 'Everything's in there', she said, 'Either hanging up or folded. I put them out in the sun a couple of times during the dries. Your suitcases are up there on top.'

He said, 'Thanks, Mercy. I'll take a few things now, I think.' He pulled down a suitcase and, taking some clothing from the cupboard, began to pack it neatly and carefully. She sat on a narrow divan and watched him. There was something unreal about the scene. It was a dream of course. Presently he would wake up in prison.

Mercy said, 'We heard that there was some sort of amnesty hovering in the air. I wondered if you'd be released.' Then more warmly, she added, 'You *were* unlucky, Paul'. Well, that was one way of looking at it. 'You'll have some breakfast?' Without waiting for a reply, she continued, 'By the way, Attoh and I are getting married in two months' time. But where we're going to live I just don't know. Can't find a place, not at our price. Do you remember saying, at the time of Independence, 'When you throw a party it rebounds in the shape of a bill. You have to catch it.' I laughed then. It seemed such a funny way to put it. But we're certainly "catching the bill" now. Prices keep rising.'

For a moment he felt forlorn. Not that he minded Mercy's getting married. But it reminded him that his friends, his town, life itself, had all moved on as usual. He had been left on one side. But had he? He paused a moment in his packing, frowning. Now he felt strangely impatient. The bitter experience, the falling of a barrier firmly across what had seemed a logical path had stirred unknown depths in him. He was aware of the stirring, but its meaning, its significance, were elusive. But one thing he realized abruptly and clearly. It was Mercy and the crowd that had stood still. He was the one who had moved on. Mercy was loyal to him, she had looked after his things, she didn't plaster him with advice or commiseration. For all these things he was grateful. But he was out of tune with her. She was

a good type, but he was out of tune. He had moved on.

She said, 'What are you going to do, Paul?' He looked up at her from the suitcase. What was he going to do? He said thoughtfully, 'I don't know. I can't start thinking, somehow. Perhaps I'll go back to the village for a bit.' Suddenly he had decided. That was exactly where he was going. He would go back to the village for a while, hide away for a while if anyone cared to put it in that way, try to regain his balance. He took a rug from the cupboard, strapped it to the suitcase. That would do for bedding if necessary. He said, 'I won't stay for breakfast, thanks Mercy. I don't think I could face a respectable family gathering just yet, especially at this hour. I think I'll be on my way. I'll collect my other things later on, if that's in order.'

'Yes, Paul, any time. Don't bury yourself in the country. Most of the old gang's still around, a couple of new nightclubs, and a real, rocking Danish cabaret.'

He laughed briefly. Same old Mercy.

They returned down the passage to the front door and out upon the tiled verandah. He said, 'Thanks for looking after my things, Mercy. I hope I can do the same for you some time.'

'I hope *not*', she retorted swiftly and they both laughed loudly. Something certainly that could have been better put.

He waved to her from the gate, and went on without looking back.

At precisely eight o'clock the uniformed attendant swung open the doors of the bank and Paul stepped inside. Behind the tellers at the long, L-shaped, glass-sheltered counter lay a large, bustling room with clerks and typists taking their places like troops being strategically deployed for some proposed onslaught. In their midst moved a solitary white man, the accountant, Mr. Fairfax. He was tall and thin, with a fluttering silky moustache, and a fluttering, dancing step, as though he might flap his wings at any moment and take off into the air. Why did everything this morning remind him of birds? He turned down the shorter length of the counter, leading to the accountant's office.

Mr. Fairfax fluttered his hands too; he peered at Paul, as though uncertain of his identity, and said vaguely, 'Oh, yes, Mr. Saki, your account, of course'. He disappeared out of the

small, semi-enclosed office. When he returned, his vagueness had gone. Perhaps recognition had supplanted it in the meantime. He said heartily, 'Well, yes, Mr. Saki, everything appears to be in order'. He pushed across a slip of paper showing the balance in Paul's account, a fairly healthy balance. He continued, 'We transferred everything into a savings account just as you requested at the time you—ah—'. 'At the time I went to prison', said Paul bluntly.

'Quite so, quite so.' He coughed and smiled and smoothed the fair moustache. 'I must say that was a shrewd thought, letting your money earn its keep while you were—ah—away. Very shrewd. Splendid.'

Paul said, 'I should like to have twenty pounds now, Mr. Fairfax, if that's in order'.

'Of course. Of course. Splendid.' Mr. Fairfax fluttered to the door again. He looked back a moment. 'Will that—ah—last very long?' he inquired.

'You'll be *surprised* how long it will last', said Paul grimly.

Outside the bank he paused for a moment and then made up his mind. He would pay the third call of the morning, and then get out of the city. The third bird of the morning, that old vulture, Reuben Agyiri.

There was certainly something of the vulture about Reuben, a heavy-bodied, thin-necked, pitch-black, perspiring vulture with eyelids that lowered over his eyes like heavy shades. A good-natured vulture. He sprang to his feet as Paul entered his office, and cried, 'Good God, Paul! You out, man?' and held out both hands, one of them brandishing a handkerchief with which he repeatedly mopped a steaming brow. Paul grinned and drew up a chair. He said drily. 'Yes, I'm out. It's dawned on someone that I'm not engaged in any subversive activities.' Reuben settled himself back in his chair and gazed at him from under the eyelids. He said, 'You were innocent, then, Paul? Funny thing, at the time they slapped you inside I thought to myself, "Paul's innocent". And you know why. Because if you'd been guilty, you'd have been too darn clever to get caught.' He roared with laughter, then suddenly stopped and stared again. 'Mind you, it looked bad, very bad. You were seen in some tricky places, at tricky times, with tricky people.' Paul smiled bleakly.

'Where things are happening, it's my job to be. I am—was—a journalist.'

The other nodded. 'So you got framed', he said almost musingly. He leaned across the desk in a confidential manner. 'All the same, Paul, some of the things you wrote. I mean, as long as you stuck to the iron heel of colonialism and the white impostaors you were safe. But when you started attacking things in high places, nearer home—.' He shook his head, the sentence left unfinished. 'So you got framed', he said again.

Another surge of impatience. Paul said, 'Colonialism is as dead as a decomposing horse. Why the hell flog it? The British have gone. Forget them. I thought it was time to look to the future, to clean up our own dirty places, high or low. And one thing you'll admit, Reuben, I've juggled with words and played for effect in my time, but everything I've written has been the truth.'

Reuben eyed him again. He said, 'Truth in the wrong place is just a mercenary soldier, Paul. When nations fall and nations rise, it's a slippery process. Sometimes you can't be too choosy about which ledge you cling to. All you ask is that it bears you up. You know what, Paul', he said with an air of discovery, 'the trouble is, you're a decent type. When nations fall and nations rise, there's no place for a decent type, well, not a comfortable place.'

'Thanks for the compliment, anyway', said Paul. Something stirred in him again, something deeper than Reuben's easy philosophy. But Reuben was asking him. 'What are your plans, Paul?'

He said quietly, 'I'm going back to my village for a while'. Reuben looked relieved. 'A good idea. You see, I think you should go abroad again for a bit. Let things here develop a rhythm of some kind. Then there'll be a place for you again. But you can't go yet. Ask for a passport now and you'll attract attention. Better lie low for a while. The village. Yes, that's a good idea.' He nodded approvingly.

Paul said, 'Can you shove any work my way?' There was a longer pause then Reuben said, 'Nothing serious, Paul, nothing political I mean. I don't play with dynamite. I get enough of it too. Every young cub with a pen in his hand sees himself as the

THE VILLAGE IN THE HILLS

Voice of Africa just now. Other things, yes. Tell you what, I've lost the chap that used to fling in a regular column on agriculture and crops and what not. Wrote under the name of 'Village Farmer'. What about that for a start? I'd like to keep it going. Makes the country readers feel they're in the picture too. You know the type of thing. "Everything this year points to a splendid crop of cicadas, but over-watering is a danger to be watched." He mopped his brow. Paul said, 'A cicada is an insect'.

Reuben beamed. 'Well, there you are, you see. You know all about it already. Good place to write it up, a village. Human interest stuff, too. I could use that. What do you call the village?'

'Nyitso', said Paul. A little mocking voice inside him said, 'Our man in Rome, our man in Chicago, our man in Nyitso'. It was such a long time since he had said it that he repeated it. 'Nyitso. In the local language it means "the day before yesterday"'.

Reuben roared with easy laughter. 'The day before yesterday. Oh, I say. That's good. That's very good. The day before yesterday.'

Reuben's laughter died away, lost in the strong, quiet voice of the great river. The long lines of creepers moved slowly in the slight breeze. But there's an interesting aspect of a language that uses tones of sounds as well as the sounds themselves to express ideas and images. In some contexts Nyitso could mean 'the day after tomorrow'.

His reverie was disturbed by the impatient, cheerful summons of a hooter. The driver was in his seat. 'Hiya Baby' was panting on the grey road. Passengers climbed in. Paul followed. This time he was on the aisle end of the seat. Against the window sat a market-mammie, the same one who had wedged him in before. She smiled in recognition. She said, 'Where are you going?' 'Nyitso', he replied. She looked thoughtful. 'Oh. The village in the pass. I never go that way any more. I go on past Azikuma on the Ho road. It's much longer that way but the road's better. Sometimes the drivers turn back on the Nyitso road, then there's a long detour round. Instead of shortening your journey, you end up by lengthening it.' Paul nodded. She did not mention her final destination but that was beside the

point, the point she had made that the village held no attraction for her. To make it clearer she added, 'Besides, you cannot even get any food there. And for me that's important. Sometimes I travel for a few days at a time. I can't carry food for all that time. A village where you can't buy a meal is no good to me.' Paul nodded again. He felt no desire to defend the place. Instead he asked, 'Are you small-time trading, or big-time?' 'Big-time', she answered, 'Buying cotton when you can get people to grow it. And citrus fruit, for our factory at the coast, also when you can get people to grow it. Not much luck where you're going. Mostly it's just cocoa there. Cocoa's too easy. One main crop and sell it to the marketing board. No trouble.' 'Well, there's something to be said for a viewpoint like that', said Paul pleasantly. The woman gave a short laugh. 'Yes. Till the crop fails, or the price drops. Then the whole village sits with no money.'

Paul found a certain enjoyment in the conversation. The easy, friendly falling in with strangers. It was something he had forgotten. He said, 'Do you always travel by bus?' She turned sharp eyes on him. 'Oh yes, you are one of our men all right. Get an income of a hundred pounds a year and immediately they want to run a six thousand pound Cadillac. No thank you.' Paul laughed. He said, 'I'm on a bus too, am I not?' They laughed together. He was rather sorry when she departed. She climbed down and settled her parcels into position, two large ones balanced easily on her head above the vivid head-cloth, the rest slung in a length of cloth across her back. She walked away heavily and strongly, with a parting wave to Paul. She waved in the manner of the area, arm bent at elbow, hand straight up, palm outside, moving, as though shining an invisible surface.

He found himself thinking about her, the example, perhaps the epitome of that unique, powerful band, the trading women of West Africa. Some of them big-time like this woman, dealing in secondary cash crops; mostly small-time, dyed cloths and carved ornaments changing into tinned milk, cigarettes, lotions; some very small-time, with little trading stalls outside their own homes, boasting English tinned corned beef, or American chewing gum. An interesting social manifestation. Mentally he was still watching the woman as she walked heavily away, the

long folds of her skirt cloth moving in flowing lines. Mentally he was writing a column about her. 'The Trading Woman.' He realized his own preoccupation with a feeling akin to joy. It was the first creative line he had written for two years, the first he had desired to write. He felt a surge of gratitude to the unknown woman. Human interest. Yes, Reuben could have some.

'From our man in Nyitso', mocked an inner voice.

For a few moments, the bitterness returned, and this time it was sharply underlined by a cold fear. Suppose his career was utterly finished. Suppose there was nothing else to do but be absorbed by the inane anonymity of a country village, become a peasant-farmer like the peasant farmers around him, glad of an occasional job as a labourer on some small near-by project, for a change and some money. For another few moments he was overwhelmed by a desire to stop the bus, to get down, to walk back if necessary, but to return to the capital, to the bold lights, the roaring traffic, the careless gaiety, even the element of danger. But at that word, caution returned, as abruptly as the previous cold fear. He mustn't take this journey too seriously, he reassured himself. The village meant nothing to him, and it would not absorb him. He would take care of that. It was a temporary resting place, hiding place, somewhere from where he could take stock of the situation, wait until the time was ripe for him to emerge once more. He was still comparatively young, not quite thirty-two. He could spare a few months, a year perhaps. But that would be all. The village meant nothing to him.

The character of the land had changed almost unbelievably. The plains had vanished. The road curved, now gently, now sharply, finding its way through the endless folds of the hills; sometimes diving down sharply to where a small bridge spanned a sparkling stream; sometimes moving warily through a cutting where the trees gazed down from the tops of the banks and shut them into an enclosed world; sometimes rising to the crest of a hill, and for a moment a wonderful panorama would spread out, valleys carpeted thickly with trees, so that it seemed one could walk in safety across their tops, across a green floor. Clearings visible here and there, where farmlands had been

prepared. Lines of palms against the sky. Sudden glimpses of the soft beautiful green of banana leaves. Now and then the bus growled to a halt in a bustling village, stores and bars standing squarely alongside the passing road, with wide doors fastened back to verandah walls. They were painted brightly, like the houses behind them, but after two or three rows there reappeared the mud-walled huts. Sheep gazed at them sombrely, panting under the shaggy brown coats with matted fringes. Little black goats leaped away with easy agility to resume cropping the verges, wicked eyes gleaming out over stubby little mouths, moving in a swift, circular motion, sometimes little beards moving too.

They were crowded, these villages, crowded with people, with habitations, with animals; the vegetation hovered all round them like a suspended wave, waiting to crash down and crowd in too, but kept sternly at bay by endless brushing and sweeping of the stark areas of bare earth that surrounded every building however small, so that no reptile could approach under cover. After each village came the graveyard, a bare, swept area of red-brown, baked earth, saved from starkness by neat lines of canna-lilies lifting golden and crimson flowers on statuesquely tall, thickly-leaved stalks. Little clusters of stones marked the graves, and all round again hung the menacing green wave.

It was nearly five o'clock when Paul stepped down from the bus at the place called Azikuma. There the road forked. To the right the tarred road swept away through the Tsawe Valley, finding its way back into the Upper Plains. To the left an earth road plunged into a tunnel of greenness that would open into the shallow valley lying between the Awudome Range and the Peki hills. He was hungry now, and there were still about twenty miles to go. The petrol station was neat, clean-lined, bright with new paint. There were two or three attendants and several loungers. 'Any cold drinks?' he asked. 'No sir, No cold drinks.' The voice was firm and decided. Paul frowned. A case-laden lorry had pulled away just as 'Hiya Baby' drew in. 'What did the lorry bring?' he asked quietly. 'Orange juice', replied the man. 'But nothing in the fridge yet. No cold drinks.' He was still firm and decided. Paul said patiently, 'A warm drink then?' 'Yes sir', said the unperturbed voice. 'One warm orange juice.'

He darted inside and returned with the opened bottle. Paul said, 'Anything to eat around here?' The man gestured to a ne. r-by store and Paul walked across. There was a small counter and behind it ran two or three shelves. His eyes studied them curiously. Tins of cocoa, English soup, Swiss jams, Japanese fish. A fat, laughing woman appeared behind the counter. She said, 'Everything's finished. Just these.' She pointed to a plate where rolls of kenkey lay swathed in leaves. 'They've been here all day', she continued. 'I charge you half.' Paul selected a handful, her generosity washing away the ill-humour aroused by the literalness of the man who still stared at him with bemused interest. 'You go quick', she warned. 'The rain is coming.'

Overhead the sky was slowly filling with masses of heavy grey cloud. A faint warning sound sang in the tree tops. He did not hurry. He had a long way to go. He would get wet anyway. When at length he emerged from the little shop he gave a last glance round the now practically deserted village, and presently moved into the green tunnel of the trees. Within a few minutes a bend had removed all trace of the village, and he was alone in a strange, still world, with only the faint warning sound singing high in the tree tops.

For a while he trudged on in the gathering gloom of the clouds, the trees forming a fringe to the farmlands on each side, a fringe that slowly changed character and grew thicker and taller and nobler.

Once he stood still and gazed about him with a warm glow akin to that he had felt as he watched the trading woman walk away. It was a place of beauty, timeless, unstirred beauty. Already the great forest giants were in evidence. Odum trees, sturdy straight unhindered trunks rising into the air, perhaps seventy, perhaps eighty feet, with thick dark foliage massing at the top; taller still the Wakas, each grey bole embellished with magnificent buttresses twisting and fluting up the trunk till it seemed to shake itself free and soar upwards alone, slim by contrast, and smooth and silvery grey. They were ethereal, these grey living spires soaring to Heaven, and there was majesty in the strong lines of the buttresses. It was like looking at a Gothic cathedral; aisles, pillars, walls, all seen at once.

There were shorter trees too, bearing moving curtains of

creepers, the strong stems of vine rubber sending out drooping masses of dark, green shiny leaves, the gentler green of the round velvet-leaves. The curtains swayed gracefully in the increasing breeze and beyond were glimpses of farm-clearings, with edging lines of trees, oil beans and avocado pears, bananas, plantains. He smiled suddenly, remembering an earnest school-master who would adjure his pupils to 'soak up knowledge as the bean soaks up salt'. But equally suddenly he frowned. Did the bean really *need* all that salt? That brought him back to the present and he strode on, through the living cathedral, the earth road damp beneath his feet from the repeated drenchings by the recent rains.

Luck was with him, in one way at least. Ominous snortings and rumblings in the rear took shape in a shabby vehicle that pursued him noisily like an aged dragon. This was no neat modern bus. It was simply and unashamedly a mammie-wagon with planks nailed across the loading-space to form benches, already packed with loudly-chattering country people, their heads permanently ducked to avoid contact with the roof as the lorry dipped and squelched through the rain-filled potholes, with mudguards flapping in desperate exertion. But its forehead proudly bore the exhortation, 'You Too Can Fly'. He climbed in.

On they went through the darkening forest, on through the shallow valley, where the seven villages of Peki lay strung out in a long row, seven clusters of lights on a dark road. The sky was dark to blackness now, the wind howled demoniacally, the tree tops dipped and swayed. Peals of thunder rumbled ominously down the valley, and sudden flashes of lightning threw isolated little scenes into sudden relief. At last, with only one passenger left aboard, 'You Too Can Fly' chugged wearily off the road into a small village nearly hidden away in the trees. A long, pink-washed, plastered wall with ornate gateway sheltered a large bare compound surrounded by square-cut houses. Paul climbed down rather stiffly and the driver eyed him with interest. He said, 'I don't go to Nyitso. Nobody goes there. Road's bad for one thing.' He might have specified other things, but he was interrupted by a fierce rolling of thunder. He said, 'Wait a minute', and ran off to the compound, reappearing with a battered little

THE VILLAGE IN THE HILLS

hurricane lamp. 'This may help you. Bring it back one day when you come this way.'

Paul thanked him and turned back on to the road, his suitcase in one hand, the small, unlighted lamp in the other. As the road commenced to rise up the hill he thought, 'The village where nobody goes. That's a third name. Oh, well, it means nothing to me.' Further up the rising ground he turned back for a moment, bracing himself against the strength of the wind. A brilliant play of lightning showed the figure of the driver, still staring after him, and the aged 'You Too Can Fly'. He grinned, then turned and walked on.

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Now the storm unleashed its full fury, as though to challenge his right to enter the village. Within minutes the entire earth had narrowed down to a fiercely whirling shroud of roaring water. Somewhere in the darkness beyond it, the thunder rolled, the trees screamed. The ditches shouted hoarsely, chokingly, underfoot. Paul climbed on, each step a dogged effort to push back the stinging shroud, head instinctively bowed, feet squelching in the mud. He was wet through, but without a care. All cares died away before this concentrated pitting of strength against the merciless elements. It was perhaps a two-mile climb, a long slow rise to the village which lay this side, the western side, of the pass. An hour had gone by when he reached the last fringe of the forest and stopped for a moment or two, panting for breath. As suddenly as it had come, the storm had gone. The moving shroud dissolved into lines of silvery water, the cry of the trees dropped to a low moaning song, and the crescendo was taken up now by the watercourses, old and new, bubbling with threats as they sprang into invigorated life. Even as he waited, the rain receded, swirled, receded again, and was gone, leaving the hot, wet earth panting as he was panting.

He moved forward slowly. In the old days, his father's house had been the first one encountered after that long slow ascent from the valley. At first it had been mud-walled, plastered over and lime-washed, with a roof of thatch. Then it had been pulled down to make way for a new house, a brick house, also plastered, with a high-pitched, sloping roof of long Roman tiles. It had been painted various colours during the course of the years, the last being a rich, reddish-brown colour which contrasted angrily with the orange tints of the tiles. Paul's mother chose the colour, not from any aesthetic oddity but because it happened to be the cheapest colour on sale at the time. She

was very old then, old, miserly and querulous, but Paul minded not at all, neither the colour of the house, nor the querulousness of the mother, because he was going abroad to Britain, to become a journalist. His father was old too, a little younger than his mother, but even more querulous, and mostly he wanted to sit on the little paved porch and stare down the village street and lament the daughters who had died and who undoubtedly would have cared for their parents in their old age. Once he lamented so loudly that Paul got as far as volunteering to give up all thoughts of a career, but the old man had grown angry at that and pointed out that it was not much use having a son, almost unexpectedly, late in one's married life, if all the boy wanted to do was to sit at home like a lack-lustre yokel. It was confusing and illogical.

It was years before Paul understood. The old man had really wanted him to go, to succeed in something, to bring credit upon the family. Yet his very soul lamented the loneliness. Like most of his kin he had an almost pathological fear of silence, and solitude. What the old man wanted was crowds of nephews, daughters-in-law, grandchildren, noise and laughter and bustle, the more the better. Later, when Paul understood, he won an award with his dissertation on the contrasting outlook of European and African aged. Later still he grimaced over that essay. It was that word 'African' again. It was an oversimplification.

The house was still the first one. In the starlight he could see it, placed rather unusually far back from the street, surrounded by a fair-sized piece of land. Beyond, other houses were discernible, with lamplight flickering through windows and doors, as people renewed their activities after the end of the storm. There was no gate and the fence was visibly rickety. Within, the space was weed-choked with a small clearing between the edge of the undergrowth and the walls of the house, a clearing swept bare of vegetation. He walked up the stone steps and into the main front room. Nothing was locked. He placed the tiny hurricane lamp on a discernible table and lit it. There was more than enough kerosene in it for the night, he noticed. By its light he saw the few pieces of furniture placed starkly in the concrete-floored room, the table, two wooden chairs, two woven chairs.

Slowly he went through the small house. It was a strange homecoming in the darkness, unannounced, wet through, to a deserted house. He was aware of the strangeness but it did not touch him. It was as though he had become a spectator, someone outside the scene. The past life, the elderly parents, the young urchin, all these things had faded into time. The man who held the little lamp above his head was someone entirely new, entirely different.

The remaining rooms were bare of furniture, save one which boasted a wooden-framed bed with kapok-filled mattress, a table and a chair. But there was evidence that someone swept the floor regularly. One of the family. He frowned then and wondered how many of the family were still in the village, and who they were. The word 'family' was applied to a multitude of branches. Cousin Aku would be here, he supposed. They had kept in intermittent touch over the years, Paul still had rights in family property. But after he was imprisoned he had deliberately sent no word, partly on account of the sickening blow to his pride, partly to avoid implicating anyone in his affairs.

He moved back to the front room and placed the lamp on the table and removed his sodden jacket, hanging it across the back of a chair.

But Cousin Aku's eyes had already seen the light flickering in the house. Paul heard the sounds of footsteps on the paved verandah outside, hands were clapped gently together, two or three times, then a voice said quietly, 'I am knocking at this door'. Paul turned to face him, a man of some fifty years, thin and tall, clad in simple country tunic and knee-length shorts. For a moment he waited for the supposed stranger to give the customary reply to the customary opening sentence, then suddenly he stepped forward eagerly. 'But surely it is Cousin Paul', he said, conventions forgotten. Paul smiled, 'Greetings to my Cousin Aku', he said, and they clasped hands. Aku spoke in rapid little rushes of words, emphasizing them with multitudinous gestures. 'We received no word of your coming', he said anxiously. 'We have had no word of you for a long time. We heard of course that you had been detained, and after that, well, we waited.' Paul nodded, rather wearily. 'Yes, but they

released me this morning—I had no time to send word.'

Aku took heed of his wet clothing with little clucking sounds of dismay. 'Come now', he said, 'across to my house. We have already finished the evening meal but we can surely find something for you. Come now, as you are; I will give you something to wear.' He swept Paul along with him, down the path, along the street to his house, through the main room and into a bedroom where he bustled about, swiftly producing garments similar to those he wore, and a towel. 'Here', he said triumphantly, 'Get yourself dry and come back to the front room.'

The front room was bright with two pressure lamps. It was plainly furnished, a dining-table with its complement of chairs, two large bookcases and a cluster of woven chairs, seats and backs woven from the strong, papery thread of the rattan palm. Yet the effect was beautiful, for the timber had been yielded by the forests of hardwood, and the lamplight lay upon it in pools of glowing splendour. As Paul stepped in from the bedroom, Aku's wife was entering through the doorway from the inner verandah, bearing a tray in her hands. She paused for a moment and her face beamed a welcome. It was years since Paul had last seen her, and then he had been a boy. It was only now that he received the full impact of her bearing and personality. She was tall, strongly and statuesquely built. The graceful garments swayed about her regally as she moved. Her smile displayed strong white teeth, and the smile lay also in her eyes. She cried out, 'Welcome home, Cousin Paul. Our ears are waving to hear your news. But eat now, and put the heart back into your stomach.' She busied herself at the table, laying a small cloth for him and setting down a bowl of fragrant, steaming ground-nut soup, and plates of coarse bread and kenkey, and a dish of rice and goat-meat and beaten yam. He accepted the food gratefully, grateful also for the customs of his people which permitted him simply to say, 'This is my home—I have returned here', and to find only welcome in the words of greeting.

Aku announced gravely, presumably to the empty room, since his wife knew already, 'Our Cousin Paul was detained in prison for political reasons'. Madam Alale's full, rather lazy

tones, said, 'I hope you have received some certificate to this effect. I believe it is quite an interesting club these days.' She laughed, a full-throated chuckling sound, and Paul liked her more each moment. Her feet seemed planted so firmly on the ground. He said, 'My Cousin Alale is a beautiful woman'. Her eyes twinkled still. She said, 'Look Aku, he comes with the habits he has learned in Europe; he makes compliments'. Aku frowned, but secretly he was rather pleased. He was immensely proud of his wife, of his family, of his home, of his position as headmaster of the near-by primary school. Alale said to Paul, 'That is very nice'. She threw out both arms in a gesture of surprising grace. She said, 'You make me feel splendid, so big and strong'. Paul said, 'Yes, compliments are good for morale-building'. Alale touched her hands together solemnly now. She said to her husband, 'It is right, what we have heard of him. He has the magic of words.'

Aku said eagerly, 'What the village needs is people like you, progressive people, people who have lived in the outside world, people who can bring back ideas to us, stimulate us, people—'. He paused, and Paul was thankful. Under the repetition of the word 'people' he felt himself turning into quite a crowd. He said slowly, 'Aku, I do not want to disappoint you, but I do not intend to remain here very long. I shall go abroad again, but I wanted to wait a while, and this seemed the best place to wait.' Aku's face fell. He said curiously, 'But how will you live if you go abroad again; will you be a journalist again?' Paul said thoughtfully, 'I don't know about journalism in the customary sense of the word. But I should like to write. Recently—very recently—I have conceived a fierce desire to write, to interpret my people to the world.' There was a moment's silence while the pressure lamps hissed and wavered. Aku said suddenly, 'And do you feel that you know your people?'

Paul felt a surge of indignation. Was this country cousin to instruct him, this—he sought for words and they leapt out from the recesses of his mind—this grey-beard loon? Then he felt ashamed. What did Aku know? He was a product of the village, he had been an assistant teacher when Paul first went to school. Now he was the headmaster. This place was his whole world. Leave him in peace. Abruptly he changed the subject.

'I suppose there have been changes here?' he inquired gently. Aku was quick to accept the implied armistice. His brow cleared. He said, 'Quite a few changes, quite a few, some progress. You will see in the morning. In the old days this was just a collection of mud-walled houses, the houses of swish; now a great number are of brick, plastered and painted nicely, and with good roofs, sometimes tiles, sometimes corrugated iron. And we have a water supply. You will see in the morning. The river has been dammed; there is a concrete dam on the hillside, and the water has been piped to many of the houses. The rest are served by stand pumps at various points.'

He spoke enthusiastically, but Paul thought he detected a satirical look in Alale's eyes. He said to her, 'You are pleased with the changes?' She shrugged her shoulders. 'With the changes, yes, but with the progress—', she gestured again as if displaying emptiness with her hands. Her differentiation between the two words interested Paul. He waited for her to continue. She said, 'The walls and floors, these are healthier than the old ones; the new roofs are stronger against the tornadoes. But progress puzzles me. In the old days when we wanted water we took a bucket to the river whenever we liked. Now the river is dammed. The pipes carry the water, but for twelve hours only each day. So you must prepare for the other twelve by filling various receptacles. Sometimes you do not fill enough. Some of the houses have water-borne sewage with septic tanks. Suppose you do not keep enough water to feed the storage cistern? Oh my!' Her face registered such comic dismay that Paul laughed aloud. She continued, 'But generally people keep too much. They said the piped water would stop the people storing water in old calabashes in their yards, and breeding mosquitoes. But now they store more than they did before, because they must provide for the twelve-hour interval. What they do not use, they tend to leave lying in the containers. In the old days they stored only what they wanted from day to day.' 'But they could have stored more than their needs in the old days', objected Paul. Alale laughed, 'Oh no! Not when you have to carry it from the river. You don't carry more than you need.'

Aku said rather testily, 'Progress comes slowly, by degrees,

not in big swoops. When we have more money flowing in the village we shall improve the water supply. It will be strongly pumped and it will be piped to all the houses, flowing all day and night. Like that in every village, the length and breadth of the land.' He was carried away by the beauty of his own vision. Paul coughed quietly and said, 'When do you hope to have sufficient funds?'

Aku subsided, looking hurt, his vision reduced again to the confines of the village. He said sadly, 'You have come at a bad time, Paul. There is little money in the village. People like myself are all right. I have my government salary from my teaching. But most of these people are not progressive. They farm as they always did, for the table, and the cash crop. The cash crop here is cocoa. This last mid-crop was poor. The rains did not come at the right time, there was blight too. The world price fell, too. I don't know why that happened, but it did. There is little money in the village. And progress seems always to cost so much money.' He waved his hands in a helpless gesture, then said angrily, 'How do they do it in other countries? Tell me that.'

Paul pondered a moment. This business of being an imported oracle from the outside world could be trying. But Aku, underneath his wide, sweeping visions, his testy impatience, was agonizingly sincere. He said carefully, 'I am not an economist, you know, but it seems to me that there are two kinds of activities, one that costs money, one that earns money. Amenities like water supplies cost money. You must offset it by something else, something that earns money.' 'Such as?' said Aku eagerly. Paul paused again. He was in deeper water now. Then suddenly, clearly, the voice of the trading woman was in his ear. 'A village where you can't buy a meal is no use to me.' He said, 'Well, just as an example, suppose you had a restaurant here, somewhere where passing travellers could have a good meal, workmen buy snacks, where people from the valley could come to enjoy the breezes in the hills. The profits could be used to pay for amenities.' Aku was horrified. He said, 'The stall-women sell fish and kenkey. One need not pass by hungry. And if a traveller needs further accommodation, let him report himself to the chief, and be allocated a rest hut, or be taken

into one of our homes. Then we all know who he is and what he is doing and how many of him there are. But you would fill the place with strangers, bringing vice from the towns. We would have to lock our doors. It is going against all our traditions.' He stopped abruptly. Paul said nothing. He was a guest in his cousin's home. But he saw the conflict in Aku's desires, the desire to retain the safe, tried traditions, the desire to encompass the new benefits of progress. He saw, and for a moment he pitied. Madam Alale said nothing. Even her eyes were expressionless. He thought again, 'She is strong', and he remembered the meaning of her name, 'Slowly flowing stream'. It was not the custom of his people to give such names, but she had been born before due time, on the banks of a river, in a storm, had survived the storm, and had squalled and kicked her way through the first eight days of comparative neglect that was customary. To all concerned she had been constantly described as the child born on the banks of the slowly flowing stream. Till the name had stuck. It suited her, too, for there was the lazy, powerful grace of leisurely waters in her movements, the deep, chuckling water-notes in her voice and laughter.

Aku said abruptly, 'Will you stay with us here Paul? Our children are all away. Two married and living in the valley, two dead, two at school.' He paused. The joyful facts and the sorrowful facts were in close juxtaposition, without evidence of emotion. That had been displayed at the time, but the time was past. 'Perhaps you would prefer your father's house. We have kept it clean and it is in good repair, although the land about it has been neglected. We kept a room furnished there for occasional guests, especially Europeans. You know they are such funny people. Not friendly. They like privacy. They make quite an obsession of it.'

Paul smiled. 'I think perhaps I will stay there, Aku', he said. 'I should like a little privacy too, perhaps, as I want sometimes to write articles for a paper, for some of that money we were talking about.'

Aku nodded. He said, 'But you will eat with us, whenever you like. At least make a point of having the evening meal with us so that we can relax after the work of the day and talk. Only my wife and myself are here, so you will make three. Three is life,

as we are always saying about everything.'

Alale said quietly, 'It is right that you eat at our table, for we have eaten the crops from your share of the lands for many years'.

For a moment Paul felt oddly humbled. They were conferring a favour, yet they made it sound as though they were receiving it.

He was glad to return to the small, quiet house, to relax on the kapok-filled mattress and to stare unseeingly into the darkness. After two years' restriction, the day had been over-full, the journey over-long, a journey from the life he had enjoyed and the desolation into which it had collapsed. A journey back into the day before yesterday.

Was Nyitso a milestone, a halting place, or a continuation of that journey? Perhaps it would travel along with him for a while, teach him something. He grimaced at the thought. Nyitso could teach him nothing. Nyitso was not a journey, not even a milestone. It was a dead end.

The scenes, the people, the voices of the day paraded themselves before him, flitting by with varying degrees of vividness. Most vivid of all, as he drifted into slumber, was Aku's voice, 'And do you feel that you know your people?'

❖ 3 ❖

It seemed to be merely a matter of moments later that Paul awoke and lay gazing in bewilderment into the darkness of the small room, the sky an oblong, star-studded patch framed by the unglazed window-space where, contrary to custom, he had left the shutters open and fastened back to the wall. 'Kronk Kronk Kronk'. That was the sound that awakened him. 'Kronk Kronk Kronk'. Sonorous and rhythmic. Then, at a higher pitch and more drawn out, 'Krrk Krrk' So, on all sides, near and far, it went on, and presently another sound intervened. This was rhythmic too, but gentler and more persistent. 'Kresh Kresh Kresh', it sang, 'Kresh Kresh Kresh'. By this time he had remembered everything, where he was, and all the events of yesterday, and something else too, something he had completely forgotten, that the early morning life of the village strives determinedly to reach the highest pitch of the day's activities before the day itself has had time to arrive, time to bathe in the rose and mauve of the dawn and to drain the darkness from the sky, leaving it filled with the softest of blue, beneath it the earth changing slowly from black through silver to living green.

Now it was still pitch dark and possibly four o'clock. 'Kronk Kronk Kronk, Kresh Kresh, Krrk Krrk.' So it went on, like a weird orchestra. The sounds became separate and distinct, identifiable. The heavy chorus was the machetes falling on the long logs brought yesterday from the farmlands, and now being reduced to manageable proportions for the day's needs. The little crescendos were the splintering down of the smaller pieces. The song of the castanets was sung by hundreds of little beads of golden maize, dancing up and down in wire trays. 'Kresh Kresh Kresh.' There was a joyous note in their song. Then suddenly the animal world joined in. 'Mehr Mehr', said the sheep sleepily and the goats replied firmly 'Bahr Bahr'.

'Mehr Mehr' the sheep cried plaintively, and 'Bahr Bahr' answered the goats in derision. By now, they were all up and about, the humans moving in little pools of light in the darkness, tiny hurricane lamps flickering on verandah walls and gateposts, the animals on the fringes, the plodding movements of the shaggy brown-and-white coated sheep, the dancing hooves of the little black goats.

Paul groaned, in capitulation to the vibration of the life that was surging noisily outside in the darkness. Then he started. An ear-piercing scream rent the air. 'Halp Halp', squalled an angry cockerel, 'Halp Halp'. This would be a newcomer to some compound, being placed in position for the day and objecting strongly. The fowls were not penned. They knew their homes, except for newcomers, who were tethered by a leg to a convenient post for three days, with their food and water placed beside them. At the end of the three days they too knew their home and were released, to cackle and scratch with the rest. But that angry cry had stirred right through the fowl world. From all sides they answered him, and then, lifting their heads higher, they greeted the coming light. 'Kokarokaroo', they called, 'Kokarokaroo', like a defiant descendant above the Bahr-Mehr chorus.

But right across it now struck the clear cool voice of the bell, the bell of the large, bare, stone church of the village, for Nyitso was a Christian village. In half an hour, called the bell, prayers will commence. The voice died away in echoes among the trees. For a moment there was silence, then the bird world responded to the bell. Tiny, pensive twitterings, louder calls, deep, vibrant notes, then suddenly a strong chorus, rising into the paling sky.

But the humans were not to be outdone. They were out in the road by now, the soft padding of bare feet and the sharper slither of toe-gripped sandals. Wrapped in long robes, yet they recognized each other from afar and voices rang out. 'Greetings, my friend. What news of your household?' 'Thank you, the news is good. What news of your household?' 'Thank you the news is good.' So they called to each other, backwards and forwards, as the footsteps slithered and the birds of tree and compound vied with the chorus of the sheep and the goats. And now a piping voice rang out, 'Here is the fish-seller passing.'

Here is the fish-seller passing.' It was the boy-messenger from the fish-dealer, bearing a tray of small fish on his head. Dried, salted fish, fried fish, smoked fish. 'Buy now', he adjured. 'Buy now, while there is plenty.' He trotted down the road, the tray balanced easily. 'Here is the fish-seller passing.'

Again the voice of the bell rang out, and again it was followed by silence, a longer deeper silence, for now the church was filled with dark, robed figures, kneeling in rows, as they too, in their manner, as the birds and the beasts had done in their manner, gave thanks to the Creator for the coming day, a day of bowed toil in rich, hot earth that was waiting impatiently for them. Perhaps in their prayers they remembered their joys and their sorrows, and perhaps in their hymns they forgot them. They sang splendidly, for they loved to sing; their voices wandered off spontaneously into harmonies, blending pleasingly.

Then they were gone, gone to the lands, while the sun still lingered below the horizon and the dawn winds stirred uneasily in preparation for his majestic arrival.

Quietness reigned, intermittently and uneasily. Here and there the old people shuffled about the houses. The cry of a sick child rose and was hushed. The dogs and cats came yawningly from their beds and grouped themselves along the roadside, awaiting the sun's warmth.

Then came the turn of the bats. First one, then another, then little groups. It was almost as though they had waited for the human householders to depart, so that in their absence they could arrogantly assert a claim to lodging in the roofs of their reluctant hosts. Full-bellied and full-voiced after the night's hunting, the brown house-bats screamed and wheeled their way back to hospitable tin roofs, slithering and scuffling on their broad feet into coveted crevices, spurning the upside-down hanging position of so many of their kind. Paul smiled as he thought, 'Even the bats in Nyitso are upside-down or rather upside-up which is upside-down for a bat'. And as he watched the oblong patch of sky grow paler in the wall, he found himself shaping the words of a column in his mind. One could create a picture of the whole life of a people, even their attitude to life from listening to their sounds. 'The Sounds of Nyitso.' No he would have to create a village, give it an imaginary name.

'The Village in the Hills'. That would be suitable. He studied himself in surprise. So different from his former writing activities. As though a painter of bold, striking landscapes in heavy oils, had turned to the production of dainty pastel-coloured miniatures. Yet there was a strange pleasure in the task. He listened to the bats again, a new sound. That would be the tiny, squeaking pipistrelles, coming home in little clouds; like moths in the dawn, passing by the tin roofs of the brown bats, and seeking out the thatched roofs, slipping in between the stiff threads of the thatch and fluttering into stillness and invisibility.

Outside, the sky was bright, although the sun's rays had not yet passed over the barrier of hill tops. Near at hand was a steady, purposeful, swishing sound. That was Aku, in knee-length heavily-gathered tunic, with stiff brush made of dozens of spines of palm leaf bound firmly together, with liana rope. He was energetically sweeping down the long, concrete runnels that carried the water from the sinks and basins of the house to the deep, open drains that bordered the roadside. Presently he ceased, and then Alale's step was heard and there was activity in Paul's kitchen. At length she paused outside his door, softly clapping her hands together several times and calling out, 'I am knocking at this door, Cousin Paul'. 'I am awake, Alale', he called back, 'and wishing you a good day.' 'A good day to you, Paul, and I have placed breakfast in your kitchen, also a table and chair, and some cups and knives. You must not waste money buying things, especially if you are not sure how long you will stay.'

She was gone then, her thrifty soul content in the thought that she had prevented expenditure on Paul's part. Buying anything, anything at all, was a serious process to Alale, something to be weighed and considered and turned over, and then only resorted to when all alternatives proved impossible.

But as Paul sat at his breakfast, another sound hurtled through the air, one that startled him so that he swore softly. It was a loud, noisy 'Crash!' A few minutes later it came again, then again. Through the window he espied the cause, a young boy with a ball which he was hurling against a piece of rusty, corrugated iron he had placed in position against the rickety fence.

Moreover, it was Paul's fence and Paul's ground. He called out to the child through the window, and, receiving no reply, called again, louder and a little angrily. The child took no notice. For a moment Paul paused, surprised. For a child to ignore an adult was a grave breach of decorum. As he watched, the child took a run forward, hurling the ball at the iron sheet, and catching it expertly as it rebounded. The resultant crash echoed through the house. Paul shouted out this time and again the child ignored the call. Angered, he walked swiftly round the side of the house and seized the child by his arm, shaking him violently. For a second of time, the child's face was a stupefied blank, then it wore a look of terror. He writhed free of Paul's grasp and rushed headlong to the gateless opening in the fence, disappearing along the road. His footsteps died away in a pattering sound. Paul stood gazing after him, rather stupefied himself. The absolute terror in the child's face had taken him aback. One would think he was some sort of monster. He growled to himself, and kicked the offending iron from the fence. It clattered to the ground and lay there, shining here and there where the rust had not yet taken over.

Presently he forgot the child. Alale's kindness had partially obviated the need for shopping, but he decided to purchase a tiny oil-stove. Then he would be fully equipped. He dressed himself neatly in shirt and long, cotton slacks, and walked slowly along the path into the road.

A sudden impulse made him turn away from the village instead of towards it, and he strolled down the road to where it left the shelter of the pass and turned to creep down the long slope of the hill. At this point a small, white-washed wall bordered the road for some twenty yards, warning and protection against a fairly precipitous drop at this point. Paul seated himself on the wall and gazed idly for a while at the surrounding forest and the valley below, while the first rays of sunlight searched through the trees as the sun climbed the eastern side of the range and slowly poured its full glory down over the westerly slopes into the valley.

Nytso in its way presented a picture of interest and appeal. It lay on the western approaches to a pass that broke the line of a range of hills. To the north-west it faced a region of great

loveliness, with ranges sweeping from south-west to north-east, while between them lay shallow valleys, watered by small, westward-running rivers, twisting and turning through the folds of the earth, some to reach the sweeping waters of the great Volta River, others, turning southward, to find their own way to the coast, and to drain into the lagoons that lay in astonishing placidity in such close proximity to an angry surf that boomed and roared over the white sands. The earth wore a magnificent green covering. In places on the hills were the remains of the original tropical forests, mighty trees soaring upward to the light and throwing out, high in the air, dense canopies of branches and leaves, so that beneath them lay a vast, hypostyle temple with living pillars, mahogany, gum copal, cedars. Across the ground and round and up the tree trunks writhed the creepers, while the tree branches bore a delicate burden of ferns, lichens, and orchids, drawing life from the decay of the bark and the fall of the rain, and never knowing direct contact with the rich earth below.

But mostly the old forest had yielded to man; to the hill slopes clung the farmlands, fields of maize, fields of yam, fields of cassava, patches of light against the darkness of the new forest with the tall red-brown trunks of the wawa trees, lifting heads of maple-shaped leaves, and, taller still, the mighty silk-cotton trees, trunks rising from buttresses neat and elegant alongside the wonderfully twisting buttresses of the grey wakas.

But in many places even the new forest was vanquished, leaving vast areas where the earth carpet was shorter but infinitely denser and of a dark, rich green where the cocoa farms rested in the far-thrown shade of the slim rising odums, and ferns clustered thankfully in the moist, shaded warmth.

From the valley below, the road curved up the hillside, passed restfully over a small plateau and then climbed again, finding its way through and over a short cluster of squat ridges till it dropped down into the drier plains on the south-eastern side of the range. On the plateau lay Nyitso, hemmed in therefore by a climb in the rear and a drop in the front, so that when it wished to expand, and this it wished only at very rare intervals, it crept sideways and pushed back the fringe of the forest. On either side of the road were houses of some pretension, brick-

built, plastered, and colour-washed, with roofs mostly of painted corrugated iron, but some of tiles. A few of them showed a friendly verandah to the road with a flight of paved steps, while behind this the house enclosed on three sides a square courtyard closed with a wall pierced by narrow gates, miniature fortresses. Others, more forbidding, placed the closing wall alongside the road, and entrance to the courtyard and the three-sectioned house was gained solely through the gates. But these were houses that had grown out of history. More modern, compact styles appeared with no courtyards, and with verandahs running alongside two or even three sides.

As one moved back from the road, evidence of comfort decreased. The next cluster was also brick-built, but the corrugated iron roofs were rusty and unpainted. Then the verandahs disappeared, then the paint then the plaster, then the corrugated iron, and the last cluster were mud-walled, brown and baking in the strong light, with thatch of palm leaves, sometimes new and casting lace shadows on the earth, more often old and dry and tattered. The change in the houses was echoed in the change in the areas round them, from neat little gardens and occasional fences to brown patches of earth vigorously swept bare and hard.

On one side of the road, centrally placed, was the large, stone church, the grass about it kept perfectly neat by the village sheep. Opposite it stood the school, a long low building divided into three classrooms. At the end of the road, just before it took breath for the last climb stood a long, well-kept building, one room deep, with a wide verandah, raised some seven or eight steps above the road level. It was the property of the enterprising Lagbo brothers, one of whom presided over a bookshop and postal agency in one section, while the other rejoiced in a staff of one assistant under the title, 'The Expect Tailor'.

Opposite was a neat squat little building also divided into two halves. One was for the use of Constable Akaga, who walked up daily from the valley, pushing a cycle on which he spun merrily down in the evenings, and one for the joint use of occasional government and semi-government officials. Sometimes a visitant from the Agricultural Department would appear, or the representative of the Cocoa Marketing Board.

Away from the road, amid the descending order of the houses, were scattered the signs of some few occupations. There was a carpenter's yard where the owner produced window-frames, or doors, or shutters, or even furniture, to order and by request. A sideline, even more profitable than the main business, was coffin making. There were two main types, wood and glass. Wood coffins were box- or casket-shaped, glass ones were also of wood but boasted three or four neatly glazed windows along each side. A windowed coffin with its glimpses of carefully ruffled cloth lent a touch of superiority to a funeral never quite achieved by any other means. There were other carpenters who worked in the valley. When there was no work they stayed in the village and spent most of the day seated round the carpenter's yard, as if drawn by the fascination of the occupation they followed.

There was the fish-dealer and herbalist who made and mended sandals when he had attended to the fish and herb customers of the day. There was the keeper of the hardware store which had its headquarters in Accra. Twice a week he closed the store and adjourned to the tiny market-place where he would fulfil his function as slaughterer and butcher, while the previous owners of a dismembered sheep or goat hovered anxiously about the potential customers at the long board whereon were spread the chunks of freshly killed meat. The rest of the trading was in the hands of the women, small-time traders with textiles and tinned goods and bottles of kerosene, all neatly arranged on wooden stalls, on verandahs if they possessed them, or outside the door if they did not. At dusk they lent the village a touch of magic, these trading stalls, for their owners would light tiny oil lamps and place them among their wares, where they gleamed steadily like constant glow-worms, faithful to their posts, flickering fingers of light touching the dancing shadows.

Mostly the villagers were farmers, for a village here was not a village in the sense accepted elsewhere, but a collection of farmhouses drawn together from the lonely farmlands into one place for mutual support and companionship. For centuries they had lived like this, marking out their family lands and working them by day, but at night retreating hastily into one

communal gathering place. Perhaps collective memory recalled the dangers of tribal warfare when humans and their livestock herded together for safety behind fortified barriers. Perhaps old superstitions lurked, when the silence and solitude of the night spoke with a thousand sinister voices and the powers of darkness could only be kept at bay by humans massed into phalanxes against them. There was no warfare now, and superstition had changed from a wild beast into a domesticated animal, but still they placed their homes closely together. For centuries they had lived like this; they could not change in a year or two.

This was the village near which Paul sat and made his plans and examined his attitude to them. At least that was his intention. He intended to be businesslike and methodical, to sketch out a possible programme. Then he would come to terms with himself, cut out the lamentations and the regrets and seek for a workable philosophy, a serviceable rudder as he navigated his life along the selected course. Plans and attitudes. Unhappily the two are inextricably mixed, for plans grow out of attitudes.

He made the attempt, summoned up into a line all the feelings of malevolence, envy, bitterness, bewilderment, and stared at them, but all the while was conscious of this new sense of something deeper. It was elusive but it was there. When he looked at the line closely he realized with a feeling of surprise that the chief source of his writing energy had been hate, hate sometimes felt, hate more often well simulated. Give him something to attack and all his command of words sprang to his aid. And now it was quite definitely unsatisfactory, even boring. This was surprising.

But at this point his meditations trailed off into nothingness. Perhaps it was the increasing warmth of the sun's rays on his back, perhaps it was the prolonged vociferousness of the school band which had spent the last fifteen minutes desperately interring John Brown's body. Perhaps it was merely a lizard, a large, long, oddly box-shaped lizard. Its back was grey and its flanks were a vivid tangerine colour with bright white dots. It stopped for a moment and stared at him, head raised, then with a whisk of its long tail and a flurry of its absurd little legs it was gone. The next lizard was not half as gaudy. It was much smaller and lither with a questioning head on an attenuated neck. It

was mostly grey. It also whisked and flurried and disappeared. The next one was colourful again. Bright blue forelegs and shoulders, shading into a grey tail.

An old woman came slowly up the road, returning home from the farmlands after already some four hours' toil. She bore a shallow basket on her head and above it balanced some long slender logs. Her face was wrinkled and tired, her eyes on the ground. As she passed, Paul raised a hand. 'A good day to you Grandmother', he called. The old woman stopped and gazed round at him, turning slowly and deliberately to keep the logs balanced. A smile illumined her face. It was a beautiful smile. She called back, 'A good day to you and may a good night follow'. She plodded on her way, as she had done for years, and Paul sat and watched the lizards, and the sun's heat grew in power.

Presently he swung off the wall and wandered through the village. The old people were all about and the young children and their young mothers, and traders, and the older children who had eluded the net of school, and the workless men returning disappointed from the valley. There were children playing and children working, children being dressed and children being bathed in buckets. They all waved to him eagerly and called out, 'Hullo Stranger. Welcome Stranger.' Sometimes they called out too loudly and their mothers reproved them, smiling curiously at this stranger. Once a soap-sud covered child called out happily, 'Hullo White Man Hullo White Man.' All within hearing roared with laughter. The mother said, 'It is your clothes. Usually she sees white men in those trousers.' The child scooped the soap from her face and stared at him eagerly and impishly. She was not to be eclipsed. She shouted, 'Oh Hullo White Man's Trousers'. They all roared with laughter again, some doubling up with mirth.

It was late afternoon when Paul finally returned to his house and found the girl standing at the fence. Bareheaded and barefooted, she wore the uniform of the school, a simply-cut, sleeveless, collar-less dress in dark green with a white belt at the waist and a white patch-pocket on the short skirt. She was thin to skinniness. She held one edge of a cloth-covered tray, resting the opposite edge on her hip bone. Her gaze fell timidly

before his, but her face was resolute. Paul paused. She was obviously waiting for him, but for the moment she did not speak. When she did speak she aroused all his indignation. Her manner was still timid but her voice was accusing. She said, 'You frightened my brother this morning'. 'Your brother', said Paul. 'You mean that cheeky little brat that was crashing all over my garden?' The girl did not raise her eyes but she shook her head determinedly. 'He was not cheeky', she said. It was all quite absurd, of course, but he had already said acidly, 'How do you know? You weren't there.' She paused for a perceptible period then raised her eyes, eyes that looked large in her thin face. She said, 'He was not cheeky. He did not speak. He does not speak. You frightened him when you came silently. He does not hear.' Paul felt rather stupid and ashamed. He said, 'Oh, he is deaf and dumb'. 'Yes', she nodded. They stared at each other for a moment, then Paul said, 'I am sorry'.

She was quite composed now, the timidity had vanished. She said, 'In the afternoon he comes with me to the farmlands, but in the morning while I am at school he plays in your ground. Generally there was no one living there, and he was quite safe too.' She added, 'He cannot hear if anything comes'. The whole difficulty of the child's adjustment to life, the whole difficulty of caring for him was summed up in the brief sentence. He felt a surge of interest. He said, 'Where do you live? You have a family?' 'Oh yes', she said, quite at home now, 'My parents are dead. We live with my Elder Father but he is very old, and we are cared for by my Little Mother, but she has three small children. She cannot watch the boy. So I bring him here.' She smiled fleetingly. Everything was now happily explained. 'I shall tell him to play very quietly', she added. 'He understands me.' Paul felt nonplussed. The organization of his own garden was neatly taken out of his hands.

The girl's words conjured up a picture of her background. By Elder Father she meant her father's eldest brother. The mother's brother would be described as an uncle. Likewise the use of the term, Little Mother, indicated the younger sister of her mother, not of her father. In the latter case she would have spoken of her aunt. Evidently one of those muddled up households where the remnants of three or four branches of a family lived together

in mutual support.

She went on eagerly, 'He will like to sweep the house for you, or help you clear the bush. He is quite strong. And he will be quite safe.' Before her persistent concern for her brother's safety, all other considerations vanished. She continued the bribery, removing the cloth from the tray. 'Look. I have brought you some tomatoes from our land, the biggest I could find.' He stared down at the tray, the pleasantly ripened tomatoes, the girl's thin arm. He said slowly, 'The boy can play here. He can help me clear the bush. But you do not have to bring gifts.'

'Please', she said, 'I should *like* you to have them'. She held out the tray to him. 'I live there', she added, gesturing down the darkening road. Near the fringe of trees a bush path cut off from the road. It wound its way round the slopes till it met the last cluster of poor huts on this side of the village. 'I must go now.' He stood there with the tray in his hands, as the girl trotted off down the road. At the turn to the bush path, she stopped and waved back at him. 'Good night', he called out and her voice drifted back in the cool air of sunset. 'Sleep well. May the day break on you.' As she turned into the forest, the small boy emerged from the sheltering fringe of trees and ran to her side. Together they disappeared quickly round a slope of the hillside.

The broad sun was sinking below the range across the other side of the valley. There would be no storm tonight. The air was quiet for the sinking to rest of the sun. Within minutes the darkness of the tropic night would descend. The old-fashioned benediction seemed still to drift quietly in the air. Paul twirled the tray of tomatoes on his fingers. He stared at the last flushing rim of the sun. He said to it, 'Sleep well. May the day break on you.' Then he shrugged his shoulders at his own absurdity and went into the house.

PART 2



The Time of Dreams

∞ 4 ∞

The time of the year was the fourth season. Elsewhere it was the start of the second half of the calendar year. But here it was the fourth of the five seasons. The long rains had drawn to a close, the short rains hovered in the future. Between them, the earth drew a deep shuddering breath which it exhaled in a long sigh, a sigh which breathed a richer greenness into the trees of the forest, the grass of the clearings, the fruits of the farmlands. There were fresh tendrils on the creepers, new branches on the trees. The cotton and the sweet-potato were already sown, the first corn crop already gathered. The fields stood empty and waiting. Presently little wisps of smoke would rise up from them, to curl among the trees, as the stubble was burned and the ground made ready for the second planting. The rice awaited harvesting, and the millet, and the yams with thickly leaved creepers trained up rows of tall posts so that they formed another forest, a dark green, swaying forest with no high canopy except the highest of all, the soft blue sky, in which a sun swam strongly but kindly.

There was money in the village from the sale of the mid-crop cocoa, but not too much, for the return this year was poor. The Harmattan, the dry wind from the north, had been too fierce so the beans were too small. The rains had been too heavy, so there was mould. The smaller crop meant smaller piles of beans so the fermentation was not good. The little Sankonuabe insect had caused damage. His name meant 'Go back to your Oil Palms', and he was called that because he mocked the cocoa-growers. There were some who took their cocoa quietly into the old French territories to the east, but this was fraught with danger. There were heavy penalties for cocoa-smuggling.

But if there was little money, there was plenty of food. The good maize crop had filled the little stores to bursting so that

their owners smiled on them, saying, 'We shall eat maize this year; plenty of maize. If the stores burn down, we shall eat roasted maize.' They smiled, for the rains and the floods were gone, the maize was good and the sun was kindly.

The flame trees were in flower. Perversely they acknowledged no season, and put out their flowers when they pleased. Now the glorious red flowers hung gracefully among the delicate feathery leaves spreading out over the houses and the pathways. The pig-poison crept everywhere, glorying in its menacing loveliness, flowers of green, yellow, orange, red, and every shade between. It was a lovely time, a time for rest, a time for dreams, even a time when you might make plans and might even believe that they would come to fruition.

Paul and Aku were at peace with everything. They were not dreaming or planning. They sat on the verandah wall and watched Alale busy at her oven. It was a good oven, built of bricks placed in a circle three feet across, each successive row narrowing in, till a large beehive lay on the cement platform raised up in the courtyard, protected by a neat little aluminium roof resting on four poles. The bricks were plastered over with good red clay, baked to compacted hardness. Aku was on holiday because the school was closed. Alale was not on holiday because women seldom are, least of all in Africa. Not that she was thinking of that or of anything except her bread, good bread, made of wheat flour, imported. These were luxuries that came in the train of a regular salary. The dough was standing in tins, rising steadily, and ready for the oven which already enclosed a fierce heat from the fire inside it, where small logs, dried peels, twigs, and dried maize cobs burnt quickly. Presently she uncovered the small opening of the beehive oven and raked out what was left of the fire. Then in through the opening, one after another, went the tins of bread, to bake in the heat where embers still smouldered. Again the opening was covered over and Alale rested from her labours. Paul said, 'Would you not prefer an oven in the kitchen?' and Alale held up both hands in protest. 'And have a kitchen roasting with heat. No thank you, Paul. Just keep a control on this progress, will you?' He laughed aloud. 'What other aspects of progress would you like to criticize?' She frowned. 'Well,

the roof for instance. In the old days we had thatch. I know it wasn't secure. Sometimes a tornado would rip off the whole lot. But at least it was easy to repair, and it didn't cost anything. But then we used corrugated iron and that we had often to paint. Where we didn't paint, it rusted, and let the rain in almost worse than the thatch. Paint costs money. So then we used these tiles. They are very pretty and you don't have to paint them, but the rain—.' She held up her hands, again with that look of comic dismay. 'You night just as well sit outside in the compound.'

Aku was busy whittling away at a row of cocoanuts with a large knife. He said, 'Alale is exaggerating. All the same, I admit that the roof leaks. I don't know why.' He squinted up into the sunlight. Paul did the same. He said, 'The pitch is too low. I don't know how high it should be, but I know it must be fairly high for tiles.' Aku and Alale stared at him. Aku said, 'So that's the answer. How wonderful. So simple. Paul, I said what we needed was progressive people who know things.' Paul accepted his oracular position more gracefully now. He said sagely, 'You will have to remove all the tiles, pull out all the timbers, and rebuild them up so that the pitch is as high as the one on my house'. They all stared across at the other house. But Paul's pleasure in his own sagacity was slightly jolted a moment later. Aku was gripped with enthusiasm. He said, 'Good. We shall do it immediately', and had a bamboo ladder against the wall before Paul could reply.

Aku's house was three-winged. The main, long room fronted the road, and boasted a tiny, paved porch. On the inner side it had a large, walled verandah bordering a courtyard, closed in on two sides by the other two wings. One wing contained three bedrooms. The other contained a kitchen, a storeroom, a modern bathroom, and a modern toilet. Bath, basin, and toilet formed a suite of which Aku was wonderfully proud. They were a sign of his progressive outlook and when he wished to emphasize this he would say airily, 'There are only one or two others in the village'. At other times, when his loyalty to the village was stirred, he would say, 'We have very many such in the village'. In truth there were exactly twelve. The carpenter could have told anyone who required accurate information

because they had been stored in his yard on arrival, exactly twelve sets, removed one by one as their owners were ready for them. That was some three or four years ago, in the first flush of excitement after a record cocoa crop. There had been none since. The piped water had temporarily assuaged the ambitions of other householders who might have been interested, and the subsequent poorer crops had made the assuagement permanent.

Alale was resting on the verandah wall now, watching Paul and Aku as they carefully lifted each of the long tiles out of position and placed them in little heaps near the head of the bamboo ladder. Into the courtyard emerged Kofi and Afiba, the two youngest children now home from secondary school for the holidays. Afiba called out, 'Paul, I have learnt to make some English-style pancakes. Will you eat some for me and tell me if they are really like the ones they eat there?' Paul looked down at her eager young face. 'Will my life be safe?' he asked. She giggled happily in response. 'I am learning cooking in the specialized course in the Young Pioneers', she said grandly. Kofi said, equally grandly, 'I was suspended from my course'. Afiba began to giggle. She said 'Oh, Paul. Kofi was learning Russian. He said to the instructor, 'Now the British have gone from ruling us, the Russians will soon be coming to rule us, so I am learning hard in preparation.' She giggled on happily. Kofi giggled too. He said, 'The instructor was furious. He said, "Get out insolent boy. No one is coming to rule us. The Russians are not colonialists." His mimicry was comical. Paul began to smile. Alale was laughing. Afiba giggled, 'Oh, what a postcard to drop'. She suddenly yelled with laughter. Alale seemed caught up in inexplicable mirth too. She echoed, 'Oh, what a postcard'. She shook down into a doubled-up position. Aku, on the roof, also began to shake with laughter. Kofi roared out, 'So I got the Hausa Farewell'. Afiba clung deliriously to a verandah post. 'The Hausa Farewell', she gasped. Aku vibrated dangerously on the roof top. They were all abandoned to the spell of mirth. They giggled, howled, and gasped. Paul laughed too, but he laughed because they laughed. He felt slightly bewildered. When they had sobered down he said to them, 'All this talk of postcards and farewells. Would you mind explaining to an

ignorant gaolbird what is so amusing', whereat they all howled again.

It was some time before Aku had recovered control of his narrow frame and narrower face to say to Paul, 'You see, President Kennedy has started a Peace Corps and these people are going to work in under-developed countries. The idea is that they will live among the people, learn their languages, and only be paid a mere subsistence wage. An English friend of mine said to me that the British had been doing this for years—that the description applied wonderfully to the colonial service, particularly the last bit. But I think he is just cynical. Anyway, some of these young people went to Lagos, and one young lady wrote a postcard to friends in America describing all the under-development in terms that upset the good people of Lagos. Apparently she dropped this postcard and it was read by somebody, and then there was a row and she went back to America on the next plane.'

'I see', said Paul. 'So dropping a postcard is now the local equivalent of the English dropping a brick.' 'That's right', nodded Aku, 'but the next bit I feel rather sad about. It happened here you see.' His face was grave again. 'A very senior British officer who was with our army was dismissed. The rumour was that he was given only twenty-four hours' notice to leave the country. I was very upset when I heard that, Paul, because it seemed to me to be a very discourteous way to dismiss anyone, and we are not a discourteous people, are we?' He was lost in thought for a moment, then continued. 'And then, *they* put on a farewell parade for him at the airport. I suppose they had to, but really, after throwing him out like that, it did seem very hypocritical. The press report said that the band played "The Hausa Farewell". So now when anybody is thrown out, we say he was given the Hausa Farewell.'

Paul suppressed a smile of amusement at the quick way these incidents had been twisted into popular speech. But the words sounded in his ears with political undertones. He felt uneasy. Rumours of disaffection, of strikes, of disorders, all these had penetrated the prison walls while he had lived each day as it came, mechanically, listlessly. Underneath, his mind had worked and probed and puzzled. The most important force

in his recent life had been fierce opposition to the enemy—the manifestations of colonialism—and an equally fierce belief in the ability of the ruling party to rule well and to rule justly. The force of both these beliefs was destroyed. The British were gone, neither angered nor discomfited, but tolerant, polite, almost as though they were secretly relieved to go. And the justice of the new rulers had been illustrated in the abrupt ending of his career, prison detention based on the deposition made by a powerful man whose enmity he had aroused in his written attacks on corruption. The Hausa Farewell to his career. He tensed a moment in the sunlight, then said abruptly, 'Come Aku, let us get on with stripping the roof'.

It was a week or so later that Aku accosted Paul with a clipping from a magazine. It showed a dance-restaurant, a tall elegant building, curving horseshoe wise round a polished sunken open-air dance floor. On the raised gallery a band was in evidence and tables were dotted along the curving arms of the horseshoe.

'Look at that, Paul', he said eagerly. 'Isn't that an elegant place? You know I had your remark about a restaurant at the back of my mind when I saw this. Imagine a place like this at the highest point of the pass, where the cool winds blow in the evening. A band playing. People coming from near and far, sitting at the tables, tourists from abroad. It would be wonderful, wouldn't it?'

'It certainly would', said Paul drily. Aku looked suddenly uncertain. He said defensively, 'Well, it was your remark you know. Didn't you mean it?'

'Well, yes', said Paul. 'But I didn't mean anything like this. Where would we get money to build a place like this?'

'Oh yes, the money', said Aku sadly.

Paul said, 'I thought of quite a simple sort of place—a covered structure where the food could be kept, and benches under the trees where the customers could sit and eat it. Then as profits increased we could become more ambitious. Mind you, the idea of putting it at the highest point of the pass is a good one. Is it still village land up there?'

'Yes, it is', said Aku eagerly. 'And we could be open at night too, when there are no travellers. Perhaps the people here would

like to go there in the evening, sit and talk, drink cocoa. We should encourage everyone to drink cocoa. But perhaps we could even have gin for the richer ones.'

Alale's deep voice said, 'That would be a nice change. Why don't we do it?'

Aku was afire again. He said, 'The men could clear the bush and prepare the place by communal labour. I could talk to the chief and the village council.'

Alale said, 'The women could supply the food in turns. I could talk to Madam Rosalie.'

There was a sudden silence. 'Ha! Madam Rosalie!' said Aku bitterly.

Alale said, 'If she approves, it will make things much easier'. Aku said, 'And what of Cousin Paul? Will she approve of him, an ex-detainee, under a political cloud?' Alale shrugged her shoulders. She said, 'Sooner or later she must hear of Paul. She probably knows all about him already. Gossip is cooked in a small pot, but a whole village can eat from it. Besides, this has nothing to do with politics.'

'Everything has to do with politics', said Aku fiercely. 'Everything. All our customs, our traditions, undermined.' He veered off at a tangent. 'And Christianity, what of that? Undermined, while we Christians sleep. Christianity has never been tested in our country. One day it will be. Then we shall not sleep, we shall not sleep in our beds. We shall stand with our backs to the walls.' His whole body was tensed like a bowstring. His hand was upraised dramatically. Paul had a sudden memory of a painting, a tensed body pierced with arrows, the face raised in mute anguish. St. Sebastian. Yes. He frowned. He said gently, 'Come, Aku. The persecutions have not yet commenced. Who is Madam Rosalie?'

Aku dropped back to earth. He said, 'Madam Rosalie is the widowed daughter of Judge Wenya, now retired, and old, returned to his village to die. She sets herself up as a leader, runs the Women's Council, wants day nurseries. Day nurseries! In a village where half the children don't even go to school. She is a party member of course.'

Paul said, 'Quite. But I haven't yet heard your real objection to her.'

Aku said, 'Last year, they called a women's meeting in the region, to discuss all sorts of things. They invited the representatives—all women of some education, not too young, not too old, that type. So far, so good. But all the other women invited were queen-mothers. Except Madam Rosalie. Why ask her? Politics, you see. We have our own queen mother.'

Alale said gently, 'She is very old'.

Aku snorted. 'Then invite no one. The queen-mother speaks for our women. That is our tradition.'

Alale sighed deeply. She said, 'We shall have to think about all this very carefully'.

So the matter was left, but a few days later Alale came walking across to Paul's house. She said innocently, 'You know, Paul, I have been chatting to Madam Rosalie, and we reached the conclusion that our village is ill-equipped to supply passing travellers with food. Particularly as this might be a source of profit to the village. On Thursday we are having a meeting of the Women's Council to discuss the matter and appoint a committee. We shall be inviting you to attend as guest speaker.'

'Well, thank you', said Paul. 'Pinch my ideas and then invite me along to discuss them.' Alale smiled demurely. 'Every town which is founded, a person founds it. But without the town, the founder is only a person.' With which cryptic remark she went on her way. Paul smiled. His protest had not been sincere. If they adopted his ideas as their own he would be just as well pleased to be free of any obligations, any entanglements in local matters. Being the economics adviser to Nyitso might be a troublesome occupation.

The meeting was duly held and Paul duly addressed it. On the whole it went off well. Madam Rosalie was an adroit chairman. She had discussed the proposition beforehand with selected henchwomen and it now only remained to put it across to the rest. But while she spoke he glanced round the meeting and his heart sank. There were some fifty women present; a handful of them possibly were educated to some extent. Most were illiterate peasants. They spent their days in toil on the lands, toil in their humble kitchens. Their bodies were thinned from toil, their hands rough with it. Pointless toil. A little organization and the same results could be achieved with half the toil; so he

thought impatiently, and realized with a shock that that was exactly what the meeting was for—to introduce some organization. It put him in a better frame of mind and he listened to Madam Rosalie with closer attention, particularly to his own credentials as she presented them to the meeting. His status was settled by a brief reference to the old custom of having 'ruling families', to one of which he belonged; his qualifications were those of a 'fresh breeze from the outer world, blowing through the forests which surround our beloved village, our home'. The women turned their eyes on him, patient eyes, yet watchful. They sat in complete silence, in attitudes of repose, their faces like masks around the watchful eyes. He felt a sudden desire to bring expression to their faces, smiles to their lips, the smiles that came so easily in spite of the toil. In a moment, the silence could turn to loud vociferousness. But they extended courtesy to him, courtesy and watchfulness.

He was well received. He spoke of the great love of Nyitso which bound them all into kinship, and nobody asked why he had stayed away so long. He spoke of the need to supply suitable refreshment to passing travellers and no one mentioned that they were now comparatively few in number. He spoke of the need for organization, for division of labour, choosing for illustration a stew-pot bubbling on a fire with each woman contributing, with little effort, her share; one some meat, one some onions, one some salt. Yet at the end they all ate of a nourishing meal. The picture was received with murmurs of approval but there was a bad moment when one woman said drily, 'Yes, if each one brings a stick we shall have a fence to keep out the leopard, but if only one of us fails to bring the stick, then there is no fence, and the leopard enters'. He countered that with, 'That is why we shall appoint a committee—to count the sticks before the darkness falls'. There was laughter at that.

Finally the scheme was adopted on the lines already outlined by the chairman. The restaurant would be built by communal labour. Thereafter each woman in turn would supply food for one day. At the end of a given period each one would be paid for her contributions, plus a share of the profits, the remainder to go into the village development funds. The committee was

duly elected to deal with details of ordering and recording, and the meeting faded away. He was left standing with Madam Rosalie.

'Well, the first step now will be the bush clearance', she said quietly. He looked at her fixedly, rather hopelessly. 'Do you think the scheme will come to anything?' She smiled. 'Why not? It is a good idea. The women who now trade in small-time catering on their little stalls often have to waste their products. They know that. This scheme will avoid waste. They will have the certainty of some return for their labour, both in payment and, we hope, in profits. The allocation of the remainder to village development will satisfy the inquiring minds of any political agents who happen to come around.' Paul did not reply. Her closing words and the manner in which she spoke them struck him as odd in a party member. But he was not taking any risks. Instead he said, 'There is one point we have forgotten. We shall have to have someone permanently working at the restaurant, two perhaps. Will it be possible to find such persons, or will they have to do this in turns also?'

Madam Rosalie said, 'It will be better to employ at least one person on a full-time basis. I know of one, Afua Tengey. She lives alone with her children as she has left the family household and the family lands. I think she would be glad of a job like this as her allowance is rather small.' 'Her allowance?' said Paul in some surprise. 'From her husband, as fixed by the magistrate', explained Madam Rosalie. 'She is divorced, you see.' 'Divorced', repeated Paul. 'Well, well, so civilization has already reached Nyitso.'

Madam Rosalie frowned. She said, 'Civilization is not virtue. It is a means to virtue. If we keep that in mind we shall not grow disillusioned.'

Paul was startled by the depth of the thought. He took closer heed of the woman. She was of medium height, and slender, with the wonderful grace of movement that belonged to the women of his people, to those, that is, who had not lost it in overmuch physical toil. She was some two or three years his senior, with good features and a voice that was soft and silky. Silky, indeed, was a good word to describe her. She spoke silkily, moved silkily, and she had an engaging manner of displaying

agreement by gently inclining her head and drooping her eyelids. But behind the silk lay a force, not the cheerful vigour of Alale, nor the idealistic conflicting energies of Aku, but a fixity of purpose that was unusual in this place, unusual, perhaps alien.

Meanwhile Aku had not permitted the grass to grow beneath his feet—nor the undergrowth to remain there. He galvanized the Village Council into such enthusiasm that not only was the selected ground to be prepared and the first simple structure erected, but the road was to be repaired too. Without waiting for any further authority he ranged the village like a predatory hawk, swooping on any children whom he recognized as his pupils, and many who were not, till clusters of children were to be seen everywhere, sitting crouched over piles of stones which they knocked into smaller sizes with any suitable object that came to hand. None of them raised any objection, probably none felt any. School holidays were simply times when they put in more hours of work at home and in the fields than they did during the school term. Working like this, in groups, was companionable and comparatively leisurely. Besides, the road, in a sense, belonged to the children. Every week they swept it with their hard little brushes of palm spines, brushing vigorously at the weeds that crept out too far across the road from the drains. Then they would sweep the drains too, earth drains that grew deeper and deeper from the sweeping. The sound of the sweeping would fill the village. But now it was filled with the sharp sounds of stone on stone. The piles of big stones grew small, and the piles of small stones grew big. Occasionally a line of children would find their way along the hillside to the old quarry and would return in statuesque dignity, a large piece of stone balanced bravely on each head.

But custom required the authority of the chief before the other matters could be undertaken by communal labour, and the customary deputation departed to secure it from Nana Osei Ade, as he sat to receive them on his carved stool of office. It was a handsome stool made of the soft white wood of the wawas, so light that it could be balanced easily on the fingers. The seat was carved, and between it and the broad pedestal were slender, finely carved little pillars of wood. But if it was light, it was

undoubtedly strong, because it had lasted many, many years. Nobody knew how old it was, just as nobody knew how old Nana Osei was, including Nana Osei himself. He was the second of the only two chiefs the people of Nyitso had known, and to them he represented history, but a history they were fast forgetting, so that sometimes the children would notice that their customs showed small digressions from those of the people around them, in the valley on one side and in the plains on the other, but few troubled to explain this to them. Perhaps few understood. Their names also reflected a variety of tribal backgrounds, but this was less noticeable because many of them now carried names taken from the scriptures of the new belief.

It would be impossible to set out a detailed history of the various peoples who had contributed to the making of Nyitso, but combining what can be verified with a certain amount of surmise, the story might be outlined as follows, in phases.

Long ago, when the ancestors of the Accras still lived in the sea, like fish, and those of the Ashantis in the ground, like mice, there came into being tribes in the grass strip that lay between the Sahara Desert, to the north, and the vast tropical forests. Perhaps they came from the grass, like grasshoppers. Nobody knows.

On the coast, the tribes there traded in gold with the Phoenicians, the Silent Trade. They would place gold on the beaches and return to the safety of the trees. The Phoenicians would come quietly up the beaches, examine the gold and weigh it and take it away to their boats, leaving goods in its stead, cloths and weapons and strange implements of strange metals. When they had gone, the tribes would return from the forests to the beaches and collect the goods. Inland, the grass tribes knew nothing of all this; but they moved southward, called by the voice of the sea.

Much later came the second phase, when fresh traders appeared off the coast, traders from Europe, seeking gold too, and presently slaves, hundreds and thousands of slaves. Forts were built along the shore by these traders, Portuguese and English at first. A little later came Dutch, Swedes, and Danes. The coastal tribes again waxed prosperous on the trade, but this time an inland nation was growing in strength and numbers,

the Ashanti nation. The Ashantis tell of Osei Tutu who planted two trees. One died, Kum-awu. One lived, Kum-ase. So this became his capital as it is to this day. At his side was his fetish priest, Okomfo Anokye, who magically created a chief's stool, which remains to this day, a stool of gold, and in it was placed the soul of the Ashanti people. Before his death Okomfo Anokye plunged his sword into the earth and this too remains to this day, buried to the hilt in the earth. No one has succeeded in drawing the sword from the ground, and many strong men have tried. Today, the Ashantis have civilized the sword, making a garden round it, and building near by a modern hospital. But with Okomfo Anokye we are still in the second phase of our story.

The third saw the gradual taking over of all European interests by the British, and the outbreak of warfare between them and the Ashantis, whose name grew loud in the ears of the people to the east who were still moving on their long, slow, seaward journey. Amongst these people Christian missionaries now moved and taught, and gradually there appeared small groups of people here and there who called themselves a variety of tribal names but who held a common faith, a new faith that cut across the old beliefs and the old hostilities.

At length came a period of intense warfare when the Ashantis swept down to the coast, fanning out widely to encompass any who might have doubts as to where their best interests lay. Legend claims that the bamboo groves around Azikuma grew from the fences which the Ashantis planted to form their camps. They took back hostages to Kumasi, European missionaries captured on the way, and this was to involve them in long-drawn-out warfare with the British.

But this would be outside the scope of our story which is concerned here with the remnants of tribes fleeing before victorious warriors and above all with the remnants of the Christian groups left leaderless. Presently they collected resourcefully into larger groups and one of these withdrew from the valleys up into the hills where survival and the quiet continuation of their beliefs seemed practicable. In this manner Nyitso was founded. At first there were many tongues spoken there but gradually these gave way to the main language

spoken in the surrounding area. Some of the varied customs survived too, in particular the rule of a chief. The method, and this was common to many tribes, was to select a suitable chief from a group composed of three regal families. When the chief died, or was de-stooled, they elected another in his stead. Sometimes the chief was a man, sometimes a woman, but gradually it became established that two should be elected, a chief and a queen-mother selected in similar fashion from the three families. More often than not, the queen-mother would be a blood sister to the chief, for the title 'mother' implied no relationship to the chief; she was mother to the people.

There were two such regal families among those who fled to Nyitso, and from their members the first group chose a chief to lead them. On his death they chose another, Nana Osei Adea. He was a young man then, young and fearless, as befitting his name which recorded his hunting prowess, with a streak of subtlety that kept his people together and unharmed as they passed from the last century into this one. He was old now, very old, and out of touch with a changing world. He could not give his people prosperity, but he gave them something that in the end might be more valuable, a sense of coherence and continuity. Nor did he hold any important post in the eyes of the country as a whole. It would be hard to find his name in any impressive official documents. His post was in the hearts and minds of his people, and they venerated him and called him 'Nana'.

This was not really a word belonging to the area but was to be heard in many other parts of the land as a title for a chief. The word meant 'One grown aged in wisdom', for in the mind of the chief resided all the minds of all the chiefs that had preceded him. Only one chief had preceded Nana Osei Adea in Nyitso, but he had remained alive long enough to be able to rely almost solely on his own contribution to accumulated wisdom. Nor did the Christians of Nyitso find any conflict between their new beliefs and such of the old beliefs as had survived. Possibly they found no conflict because they did not seek for conflict.

Such was the old, tired man who sat on the carved stool and assented to the plan of the Village Council. He assented with a

flicker of interest in his eyes because in his heart he cherished a dream, that one day his people would speak from their hillside fortress, and the voice in which they spoke would be heard far across the land. So when the councillors spoke of better contact with the world below the pass, the interest flickered. But the details left him uninterested. He was too old for overmuch detail.

By custom, Monday was the day usually allocated to communal labour and this particular Monday was a day of activity seldom seen in Nyitso. Since Friday the chief's crier had been out, perambulating the village. Every twenty yards he would stop, beat fiercely on the gong, and intone in a loud voice a brief indication of the purpose of the required labour, ending with an exhortation that all should attend. Then he would march with great strides another twenty yards and repeat the performance, his voice seeming to grow in power as he proceeded. The crier was often a cause of some amusement to the village because he was a little crazy and sometimes he would forget the message he was supposed to announce. Then he would stop dead still, wherever he was, in the midst of the small market-place, or outside a house, or even in the middle of the road, and relapse into a period of quiet meditation for anything up to half an hour when his face would suddenly take on an expression of great happiness as the memory returned to his limping mind and he would march firmly on his way. But this time he even forgot to forget, so entranced was he with the novelty of the occasion, because the other occasions were so monotonous; clearing the main paths to the farmlands, cleaning up the graveyard, closing the long, cesspit trenches and building new ones. But this time it was something new. He was so interested he even added bits of information of his own to the general message. Some of the embroideries were misleading but nobody grew confused, because gossip had travelled ahead of the crier and gossip runs with two feet, each of which outruns the other.

If the novelty appealed to the crier, it appealed to the villagers too. Usually quite a few excused themselves from communal labour, paying the customary fee instead. But this time the monetary receipts were few, and from five o'clock onward the road was black with working figures. The bell rang three times that morning, once as usual to announce the coming of the day,

once as usual to announce the commencement of prayers in the dark church. The third time was to announce to the tardy that work was commencing. They divided into six groups, five to work on the five sections of the road marked out for repairs, the sixth to clear the allotted place at the top of the pass. The women walked in long files from the old quarry, bearing the bigger stones on their heads, and the men rammed these into position on the road. Above them they rammed the smaller stones carried to them by the children, in headpans, from the big piles they had already prepared.

And again the sound of stone upon stone filled the village. But presently they began to sing and when they sang they worked faster and more rhythmically and the stones fell faster into position. Sometimes a more exuberant one would lift head and voice in an extempore solo and the others would draw breath and give way to the solitary voice vibrating high in the air, till suddenly, in unison, they would start again, a great wave of song curling over and breaking and spreading down the hillside.

Paul worked too. Clad only in country shorts borrowed from Aku he laboured in the sun, close to the hot earth, and his mind fixed itself on the earth and the sunshine and the rounded stones, till it thrust out bitterness and envy and malevolence, so that they left him, joining the lines of glistening sweat.

At the midday halt, Aku came running up in glee. He was also covered with sweat and dust so that the bones of his face and body seemed to stand out. He said, 'Paul, Paul, this is wonderful. The road is taking shape again. It was a good road really, just needed to have the ruts filled and the surface repaired in places. Why did we leave it for so long?' And without waiting for a reply he continued, 'The bush has been cleared for the restaurant, and they have started on the building, just wood and mud as you suggested. Last week Kofi and Afiba organized their friends and while the boys cut thatch for the roof, the girls made clay bricks for the walls. Tomorrow the carpenter is coming to tidy everything up and to make some benches. Paul, do you think we should have some of the round kind, that fit around the trees?' He was not really asking. He was talking to himself, watching the place take shape in his mind. He had a dish of rice and

beans and he fed himself expertly with his fingers, although at home he always used a knife and fork. He was almost dreadfully happy.

Paul rolled over in the grass and stared up at the sky, then at the tree tops. There were a pair of birds there, plantain eaters, running backwards and forwards along the branches, calling noisily. A glimpse of brown throat and dark-splashed white breast. He eyed them for a while, then rolled over again. He said, 'If we had paid these people to work, they wouldn't have done a quarter of what they've done. Why is that?'

Aku stared at him for a moment, and then said thoughtfully, 'Yes. Quite true. They would have worked slowly and people would call us lazy. Yet you know, Paul, that in our village we work hard, all day practically. Why do they say that Africans are lazy?'

Paul said, ' "Africans" is a mighty big word. It covers multitudes. How can it describe them all? In our village we can only go ahead in our own way and leave the outside people to their judgments and their generalizations.'

Meanwhile Aku had reached an answer to the first question. He said, 'You know, when you are paid for something, it becomes a matter of measurement. You measure your labour against the offered fee. You allow the measured amount, less if possible, why more? But when you give your labour, there is no measurement. You give freely, you pour it out.' He cleansed his fingers carefully on the leaves and presently they returned to their toil.

As Paul worked, he had a shadow beside him, a small, half-naked shadow who handed him stones when he wanted them and held the rammer for him while he adjusted the stones, and sometimes smiled at him in happy companionship so that Paul perforce smiled back. It was Togbe, the deaf and dumb boy, and he was becoming a perpetual shadow. Every morning Paul would hear the school band break into raucous jubilation and a few minutes later he would lift his eyes to the fence to see a small figure glide in through the opening. Presently Togbe would set to work, clearing the garden of undergrowth, and it was yielding steadily to his efforts. The position of the sun would tell him when to expect his sister's return from the school and

he would await her at the fence, slipping out into the road as he saw her approach. Together they would trot down the road, along the bush path, and round the slope of the hillside. In the afternoons he did not come because then they went to the farmlands. Even when the school holidays commenced, the programme was unchanged because he was still alone in the mornings, while his sister was engaged in her holiday employment, sewing clothes and new curtains in the home of one of the more well-to-do families. Paul was uncertain what to do about Togbe. On the one hand, the boy was clearing the garden and marking out places for beds intended for planting tomatoes and beans and marrows. He was perhaps entitled to some payment. On the other hand, the situation was not one of Paul's arranging and he didn't want to become too involved in it. Moreover, he was hoarding his money carefully and there was really no reason why he should pay anything out for services given voluntarily in return for a favour. All the same he felt rather guilty when the small figure materialized at his side every time he commenced any work outside himself. It was this feeling that made him more accommodating in the matter of the cat.

It was quite a handsome cat, half-grown, the fur mostly white with green and black splashes here and there. The first time Paul saw it, it was approaching the small porch from the side where the undergrowth was still thick, but it stopped at his step, stared at him suspiciously then darted back under cover. He thought no more about it, but a couple of days later he found it sunning itself on the porch in the afternoon sun and again it darted to cover. Next morning he saw it again, this time with Togbe. Togbe was busy with a machete, swinging it vigorously in swift, rhythmic strokes, as the grass and weeds and tangled wild growth gave way before him. The cat was crouched near by, its head on its paws, watching every movement with interest. Now and then it idly swished its tail. When Togbe stopped for a rest the cat smoothed itself against his legs and he stooped and stroked its head and slowly pulled its ears through his fingers. Paul watched with interest for a moment. Perhaps the boy, locked in his silent world, found a truer companionship in the animal world than he could find among his own kind.

Ama confirmed that it was Togbe's cat. She said hastily, 'It

does not want food. We bring it scraps in the morning. I thought it was a good idea for Togbe to bring it here, because he plays very quietly when he has the cat.' She looked at him anxiously, but Paul made no further comment. He felt slightly irritated. They might have asked him first. On the other hand Togbe was such a willing little worker, he had earned certain rights to the garden. The cat did no harm and he wouldn't object as long as it stayed out in the garden. From this he passed to the thought that a cat was certainly a useful animal, it would keep the place free of rats and mice. Perhaps he should encourage it into the house. But he wasn't going to bother feeding it. That was the children's responsibility. He pondered for a while over the question of animals. He neither liked nor disliked them. On the one hand he couldn't understand the sort of sentimentality about them that you found in some places, on the other hand cruelty, particularly senseless cruelty, filled him with revulsion. But cats were rather special animals, or had he picked up that idea from his London landlady of so long ago? He dismissed the cat from his mind, so completely that a few days later he was surprised to find himself putting down an old tin into which he poured some liquid tinned milk. Again he felt a little annoyed with himself and the children and the cat. Here he was hoarding every penny of the payments Reuben was making him, and now he squandered milk on a cat. It was only because it was a young cat, still half-grown. A cat needed milk to grow, it needed protein. It would never see meat in the household whence it came unless it caught rats of course. He pondered for a while on the rats, the dark little shadows that sought out Man's habitations to devour his food, bringing allies with them, lice and ticks. It was a young cat. He doubted whether it could cope with a really fierce rat yet. It needed milk.

Then one morning there was a small incident. Togbe was sitting on the kitchen steps, in Paul's view, and the cat was daintily lapping the milk which had just been placed there for it. But—in the manner of cats—it had decided that morning that it did not desire much food, and after a few quiet moments of lapping it rose from the tin, yawned, stretched, licked its chops energetically and strolled to the edge of the steps where it sat, diligently washing itself in the sun. Togbe sat still for a while,

watching the cat. Then he looked at the tin, then at the cat, then at the tin, then all around him. Very slowly his hand came out, he took the tin, held it to his lips and drained the milk. He replaced it quickly, sat for a moment, then suddenly began caressing the cat as though to compensate it for the theft of its milk.

Paul frowned. That evening he strolled down the road away from the village at a time when people were returning from the farmlands. In due course the children appeared. Togbe was trotting along happily, under a load of firewood, his machete clasped in his hand. Ama also bore a headload, a large covered basin. Against her side she pressed the edge of the little tray that Paul had come to recognize as the salver on which gifts were offered to him. Ama kept up a steady barrage of bribery to insure against Togbe's possible eviction from the garden. Her face lighted up now as she recognized him and she slid gently to the ground, ridding herself of both burdens. When she rose she offered him the tray with its embroidered cloth. She said, 'Look! I have brought you some avocado pears. These two are quite ripe, these are half-ripe, and these are unripe. So they will last over many days.' He said, 'You are very kind, Ama, but why do you bring me gifts?' She smiled ingenuously. 'You are our friend', she said, and Paul left it at that. Bribery or not, it was somehow satisfying, a little flattering.

He said, 'Ama, in your house, is the Little Mother kind to you?' She looked at him in astonishment. 'Yes, thank you, Paul', she said; they were on the friendliest of terms by now. 'She works very hard, for there is no man to do the heavy work on the farmland. There are three small children, and the old man is often sick. She is a good woman, very good.' She paused a while, then continued shyly, 'That is why I go to school. Little Mother cannot read or write and I did not go to school either when I was very small. But last year the headmaster, your cousin, started a special class. He said if there were any children too old for the children's classes but they wanted to learn to read and write and count, he would make a special class for them. Little Mother said to me that I must go.'

Paul stood in silence for a moment, a moment of humility before people like Aku, so confident in the progressive influence

of his school with its staff of one assistant master and one pupil teacher. And before Little Mother too, who spent her entire life in unrewarding toil, dimly sensing a richer world beyond, a world to which literacy was the key, and urging her niece to put her hands to that key.

He said then, 'Togbe is very thin. What do you eat at home? Does he have enough?' Again she looked surprised. 'Oh, yes. We have plenty of food, yams mostly, and maize and cassava. Bananas and plantains. We have Akara sometimes, and Ogidi, and Foofoo. Sometimes, when we have a little money, we buy smoked fish.' Her voice rattled on with pride in the lavish banquet that was perpetually within reach. As Paul took the tray from her she said, again rather shyly, 'Do you like my embroidery?' He examined the adequately-sewn little cloth with a show of attention, and said, 'This is very pretty. Where did you learn? Young Pioneers I suppose?' 'Yes', she agreed happily. 'I will make you one if you like—but you will have to buy the thread', she added in haste. Paul laughed. 'That will be very nice. I must remember it.'

That night he sat for a long time, thinking about Ama and Togbe and the cat's milk. The Akara was a dish of beans, soaked and ground then pounded into cakes and fried in palm oil, and Ogidi was maize, soaked for days then pounded, mixed with water, and eventually strained, leaving a fine starch which was cooked. Foofoo, the main dish, was beaten yam, also cooked and strained and pounded.

Not a scientific diet by any standards. No dairy products, no meat, no grain, other than maize, a minimum of fish, and smoked at that. No meat, no dairy products, because there were no cattle. No cattle—the tsetse fly saw to that. No eggs, for the life of the hen was short and the eggs she laid must be allowed to become chickens and of these the hawks would take the greater share. Pen them? Yes, then you must feed them, feed them on maize, maize from the household. Does one take the maize of the children and cast it to fowls? He threw down his pen in disgust, and said 'Literacy be damned. We are the creation of our ill-treated bellies.' A little later, he took up the pen again, and headed the column, 'Yams, mostly, and maize and cassava'.

Thereafter the expenditure on tinned milk increased and each morning, feeling rather cross with himself, he appeared on the porch with a cup in one hand and the cat's tin in the other. 'Here', he said to Togbe. 'This is yours and this is the cat's. Have some protein on me.' And if Togbe did not hear the words, he understood the gesture and he drank greedily, smacking his lips loudly as he finished so that the cat would pause in its lapping and stare at him for a moment over the curled-up rim of the old tin. But Togbe didn't hear the sound, and Paul didn't care and the cat didn't really mind either.

But once when he offered Ama some milk she refused it. 'I don't want to grow fat', she said earnestly and Paul smiled to himself at youthful vanity, for Ama had a long way to go to become fat. By this time he was aware of Ama's passionate interest in the exotic females who stared insolently or provocatively from the pages of old magazines. She clipped them out avidly and reverently and bore them home. He wondered if they reposed horizontally in a boxed-up hoard, or vertically on the walls of the mud-walled hut that Ama called home.

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The road had certainly taken shape again. The lower portion on both sides of the pass still needed attention, but this could be done at a more leisurely pace on subsequent Mondays. The main portion, from the steepness just before the village to the slight rise beyond it and the first plunge into the plains below presented again a compact surface of two layers of stones covered with laterite firmly packed down. All the ruts and holes had vanished. To make it a really good job, Judge Wenya, now retired, hired a steamroller, paying from his own pocket for a whole afternoon's work. Further, he paid the driver extra so that the work was done on a Sunday afternoon, when all the villagers were free, and able to enjoy the spectacle.

Sunday was a great day in Nyitso. For once the bell did not toll in the darkness, but if you cared to listen, most of the other sounds were there. The sheep and the goats were chased out to graze and the fowls were shooed off the verandahs. Wood-chopping and house-sweeping sounded in volume and when all was done a period of comparative silence followed, while the villagers ate the first meal of the day and then addressed themselves to the important task of bathing and dressing for church. Comparative silence, broken perhaps by a childish shout of protest against a soap-filled eye. Comparative silence, and if you listened you could hear the loveliest sound of the morning, the liquid notes of the little bulbul perched on a near-by tree. His three-noted song was joyous. 'Witchdoctor's sick', he cried. 'Witchdoctor's sick.' He twittered quietly as he hopped vigorously about the tree, then broke out into sudden scolding as he spied possible danger on the ground. He moved off to another tree, leaving a jubilant message trilling in the air. 'Witchdoctor's sick.' There were little black and white birds everywhere among the houses, wagtails darting and bobbing

in the compounds, or twittering on the roof-tops, while above them wheeled and shrilled the swifts.

Then the bell clamoured forth its first summons and a great migratory movement began from the houses. All the colours of the rainbow, all the colours of all the seasons, mingling into a vast kaleidoscope of colour, with the schoolchildren striking an austere note in their white dresses, and white shirts and shorts. Most of the men wore the kente, even Kofi, and very grown-up and proud he looked as he swung his robe about him, over his plain tunic, in carefully casual folds. Afiba too looked grown up and proud of her long skirt with the flounced short tunic above. Her head-dress was wound carefully so as not to obscure a view of her earrings, long, fragile and graceful. Earrings of gold, gold from the rich earth, gold of a purity that brought the Phoenicians seeking it all these years ago. Gold of a purity that earned for it a premium of a shilling in the pound in the England of three centuries ago and gave the language the new word, Guinea.

The school-children assembled outside the school and before them stood their band, resplendent with blue sashes across their chests, while facing them stood assistant master Thomas Agokoli, whose love for the band far outshone his love for the classroom, though he was an earnest teacher, with an earnest face and large horn-rimmed glasses which glinted in the sun as he ran an eye over the assembled throng. Then he raised an arm commandingly and at the signal the band attacked the music with almost ferocious vigour. In a land where all is noise and rhythm and vigour, God must inevitably be worshipped in the same way. The band led the parade of white-clad children down the village, up the village, between the colourful crowds massed along the roadside. The children sang, their voices rising high and clear to the wispy clouds floating in the skies above; the women sang and the sound curled and surged through the trees; the men sang and the deep notes echoed in the undergrowth and roved away down the slopes. Some of the women even swayed and clapped their hands in unison with the song, and Aku frowned, for he felt it was not seemly, but it was not much of a frown, for something inside him cried out, too, to swing and sway and beat his hands to the music. Then the band swung up to the wide door of the church where the

visiting minister stood, black-robed, and awaiting them. The music ceased, the voices were hushed, and the gay figures slipped quietly into the coolness of the old, stone church, and outside it the village was abandoned to the swifts and the wagtails and the great pied crows that hopped heavily about the houses, their white breasts gleaming against their black satiny plumage. Even the birds seemed attired with Sabbath day formality.

After church there was another weekly ceremony, when the crowds came out upon the green grass and waited in chattering groups while upon the steps gathered the postal agent, the letter-writer, the chairman of the Village Council, and one or two other strategically employed persons who acted as letter-receivers on behalf of their less sophisticated or perhaps illiterate brethren. Then what mail there was was distributed to the excited recipients and the more there was, the broader the smile of the letter-writer. For he was also the letter-reader, and tomorrow many of these letters would find their way to his table outside the postal agency to be slowly and loudly deciphered in return for a small fee.

The afternoon was devoted to social occasions when every verandah had its lounging groups and many a family trooped off down to the valley or to the plains. But today, few families left the village, and sociable inter-visiting was left to the educated ones who were expected to be slightly blasé under all circumstances. The rest threw pretence to the winds and massed along the roadside as Judge Wenza's hired steamroller commenced its steady, smoothing perambulation. Some sighed with awe and some with satisfaction, and little boys ran shrieking behind it or tumbled perilously in front of it. And if Paul had recollected the feelings with which he had re-entered his village that stormy night, he would have been, or should have been, amazed. For truly there was never a dull moment in Nyitso.

Thereafter, the restaurant got off to a good start, although there were moments fraught with anxiety and hostility. The neat, white-washed structure in the midst of the clearing consisted of a storage section, where the food would be delivered, a serving section whence it would be dispensed, and an unwalled but thatched-over area where the customers would stand,

awaiting their requirements, from the hands of Afua Tengey. The supplying-women had been allocated their days, and hot food was at first to be kept to a minimum, till customers increased in number. Afua had a large book wherein the daily receipts and sales of food were to be recorded and a hinged box where the cash was to be deposited. Afua was known to all as an honest woman, but the committee would inspect the book at intervals to compare the quantity of food sold with the quantity sent by the suppliers and with the volume of cash collected. As Madam Rosalie herself would head the committee there was little chance of anything going seriously wrong. The carpenter, on behalf of the Village Council, nailed up a neat sign pointing to the restaurant. On one side it said, 'Nyitso Restaurant'; on the other 'Self-Help Project'. After all, the Village Council was more than a little interested. After profits had been allotted to 'shareholders' the rest would go to the Village Development Fund which Alale persistently referred to as the V.D. Fund, and when Aku could bear this no longer and testily explained the reason for his objection, Alale said innocently, 'But we are hoping to have a Health Clinic, too, aren't we?'

There was some tension about the way the grounds were treated. Some wanted the entire area swept bare of all vegetation which, they maintained, simply provided cover for the approach of menacing snakes. Others countered this by observing that large numbers of snakes were completely harmless and anyway snakes, even dangerous ones, seldom went out of their way to come out into the open. Closely cropped grass would be just as open as bare earth and the sheep could be led in regularly to ensure close-cropping. Moreover, they ended triumphantly, open dust harboured far more dangerous menaces than snakes; the eggs of tapeworm were carried by dust, of roundworm, threadworm, and ankylostoma. Chigger fleas thrived in dust. As they had gleaned their information from a startling film show recently provided by the Mobile Information van, the first group was silenced.

Another dispute was more personal and more acrid. The central figure was Afua herself whose second son had appeared in the restaurant grounds busily sweeping and cleaning. The

echoes of it reached Paul via Alale, who said that Afua had taken the boy up to help her set the place to rights, but a committee member had objected on the grounds that the sight of a leper in a restaurant would hardly encourage customers. 'A leper', said Paul anxiously. 'I thought we were practically free of that, up here.' 'We are', said Alale, 'Occasionally a case is found, usually a returning workman. We had a case early in this year, but he was sent off to a leprosarium and he wasn't here long enough to do any harm.' 'Well, what about this boy?' asked Paul impatiently.

'Well, you see', said Alale thoughtfully, 'In a sense they are both right. The mother is right because the boy is not a leper, and the woman is right because the customers could easily mistake him for a leper. His face is awful, all eaten away. Very little nose left, and the left side of his face distorted. It was some kind of bone complaint he developed.' Her voice dropped low. 'The father was a queer man. Quite nice sometimes. At others he would go mad on palm wine, quite beserk, and once—this is some years ago—he attacked the boy and struck his face repeatedly. The mother rushed to save the boy and neighbours came running and there was a real row. That is why she is divorced from him, you see. The magistrate said some horrible things to him. But it didn't help the boy because this bone disease started and before they could stop it it spoiled his face. Afua was always trotting off with him to the valley and once they took him up to Kumasi hospital. He was there for months. He's all right now. The disease has stopped and his face has healthy skin, but it is rather sad for him because stopping the disease didn't put back the parts already gone and nobody likes to look at him.' Paul said anxiously, 'And how has this particular row ended?' Alale said, 'Madam Rosalie has ruled that *no one* may have *anything* to do with the restaurant without permission from the committee. So she has got rid of the boy without hurting the mother's feelings. Oh, and another thing, we have decided to mark off the grounds of the restaurant by planting a hedge. Otherwise, you know the villagers. They will stand gaping at the customers, and crowding in, and it will be like a market.'

When the restaurant was finally ready for the opening day, it

was quite a cheerful sight. The bush clearers had been told to leave the larger trees standing, and two or three fine silk-cotton trees lent a touch of nobility to the scene. There were several shorter trees too, camphors with dark shiny leaves, and feathery tsetse trees with their branches festooned with masses of fairy-like leaves. A solitary cabbage palm lent a comical touch with its abrupt bunch of leaves above a straight trunk. The Ashantis call them Murderers' Hats. The grass, which always appears miraculously when the undergrowth is cleared, was already showing itself. In the midst of all stood the small, white-washed building with its thatch of lacy palm leaves, and on the perimeter were the shaky signs of the newly planted hedge of kpoti. The children eyed the new hedge with glee. Later they would draw from it a thick cloudy sap and blow this up into thousands of fantastic bubbles.

Ama was impressed to a state of wide-eyed wonder. A couple of days' pondering produced her thoughtful advice to Paul that now that his garden had practically been cleared of undergrowth, he should repair the fence and plant a similar hedge. She described in some detail how Little Mother had taught her to fry the dried seeds and draw off the oil, mixing this with burnt plantain ashes to make soap, and how this in turn could be mixed with salt to make a mixture for cleaning teeth. If the leaves were pounded into a thick juice and mixed with the juice of limes, it made a cure for fever.

The merits of kpoti seemed to be practically inexhaustible. As she spoke it brought back to Paul memories of his mother, also pounding the leaves to make fever cure. He could almost taste it as he thought about it. Those days were gone. Now he carried a small container of tiny anti-malarial tablets which furnished, in the words of the makers, complete protection. The words were true. He had forgotten what fever was like. Not that this was an easy gospel to spread. Most people still thought that medicine, like food, should be grasped from the earth or the trees. On neither would they willingly spend money. Money was for important things.

Half-jokingly he said to Ama, 'Very well, if I plant a kpoti hedge, you must come and help me', and she agreed immediately. 'Tomorrow afternoon', she said eagerly. 'There is

very little work now at the farm as we are waiting to plant the second maize crop.' Togbe looked from one to the other and nodded wisely. He had not grasped the import of the conversation but his sister and this new-found adult friend comprised most of his world. If they were in agreement, so was he.

The record of the next day was not in the least breath-taking, yet it took up quite a space in Paul's journal. Writing it up had become a habit now, a new habit that had never occurred to him in earlier days. That first morning in Nyitso he bought the book, a neat, hard-backed book, in the bookshop. His reasons he did not know. Perhaps a need to come to terms with a world somehow grown unfamiliar. Perhaps a need to understand the inner stirrings that were even more unfamiliar. Vaguely he felt that some sort of written record would help, that it would plot the course, reveal himself to himself. He headed it grandly, '*Meditations of an ex-political detainee on being released from imprisonment*'. Thereafter, daily, he noted the date and made comments. Sometimes people appeared in the pages, sometimes events, sometimes ideas, sometimes merely reflections. This particular day provided something of everything.

He was making a personal contribution to the success of the restaurant. Very early in the morning he set off down to the valley, and he carried the battered little hurricane lamp he had brought up the road from the tiny village immediately below. '*You Too Can Fly*' had not yet set off. It was standing silently outside the long pink-washed wall, occasionally seeming to tremble as the dawn winds stirred the mudguards. Driver Joe recognized Paul with interest. He accepted the lamp phlegmatically and they spent a few moments in the customary greetings, inquiries and desultory conversation, while the driver toyed with a chewstick in his mouth. Presently Paul said, 'How much would you save on a trip, say to the border, or to the plains, or to the highlands, if you went via Nyitso instead of round the hills?' Driver Joe looked thoughtful. 'Couldn't say exactly', he answered. 'Might even be two shillings a head.' Paul said, 'If you reduced the fares by one shilling and sixpence a head, you would show a nice extra profit'. The man looked interested. He said, 'Yes. And the passengers would come this way if the fares were lowered, but the road is bad through the

village.' 'The road is repaired', said Paul.

They sat a while in deep silence, for this is the correct method of conducting an important discussion. For a man may learn from any chameleon that to walk slowly leads to death, but to walk quickly only leads likewise to death. Finally Paul said carelessly, 'On Friday we are opening a restaurant. If you bring a load of passengers, everything they eat will be charged half-price for the opening day.' The driver nodded. 'Yes?' he commented. 'That should bring plenty of them inside.' They paused again while Paul threw small pebbles at a near-by rock. Driver Joe plied his chewstick vigorously. The ends were nicely frayed now, and he worked it up and down and roundabout, bringing his teeth to a state of irreproachable whiteness.

Paul said, 'For every one that buys anything, I shall pay you sixpence a head'. 'Anything at all?' asked the driver, pausing in his dental activities. 'Anything at all', said Paul. 'And after Friday, for one month, every customer you bring I shall pay you a penny a head. After that you should be making enough profit out of your reduced fares.' He threw a last pebble at the rock and hit it plumb in the centre. Driver Joe removed his chewstick. 'If the road is good, other drivers will come too.' 'Yes', said Paul. 'But not at first, because they will not know. Soon they will know, but how many of them live here in the valley? Two or three at most. Some part of their journey they must run with an empty bus. But you live here, at the foot of the pass. Always there will be someone for the last part of the journey, those from the plains who seek the valley, those from the valley who seek the plains. Either way you drop the last ones and you are nearly home. Your profits must be greater than those of any other.' The man regarded him silently for a while. 'All right', he said at length, 'I'll bring a load on Friday. Pick them up at the bridge and reach Nyitso after midday. They will be hungry then. I'll put up a notice in the bus under the other names of places where I go, "By Way of Nyitso". That's right isn't it?' Paul produced a piece of stout cotton weave with a message printed on it. He said, 'Put this up on the bus. This is about the opening day and the half-price. Then you'll get a good load.' He handed over the cloth and stood watching as Driver Joe set the ancient vehicle in motion and pulled out upon the road. With a

final wave of his hand he was gone.

It was strange and rather pleasant to be out of the narrow world of the village, to be back in the broader more sweeping world of the valley. He walked idly but steadily along the main highway, passing village after village, all closely clustered, one hardly stopping before another began, all busy, teeming with people. The rice crops had been harvested, and the millet, but these were unimportant compared with the main food crop, the yam. On all sides was evidence of preparation for the yam festival.

The road was solid underfoot, a good modern earth road coiling through the villages. It beckoned to adventure and experience, beckoned imperatively, promisingly, but the tall trees gazed down from the hillsides and the breezes sighed through them with a voice of warning and yearning. It was like that day on the dancing bus, an endless question. Perhaps there was no answer.

There were Christian churches scattered along the valley and there were fetish groves too. In one place a death had just occurred. The bell in the small white-washed church was tolling dismally. Beneath it, the talking drums throbbed and hummed, to carry the message to ears that the bell could not reach. Perhaps there was no question either.

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently. It was no good getting bogged down in philosophical meditations. He hadn't the equipment to get out. He felt strangely at ease as he made the admission. No good struggling towards answers. He hadn't the equipment. Let the answers come to him. And at that point he remembered the children and the kpoti hedge. Better turn back. It would be a long enough walk as it was.

He was saved from the walk. A neat little Volkswagen car came scampering along the road like a cheery scarab. It drew up beside him and Madam Rosalie's silky voice inquired, 'Can I offer you a lift, Mr. Saki?' He accepted pleasantly, and settled himself beside her, adjusting his purchases on his knees. She was dressed in European style today, a crisp cotton dress and fashionable shoes. She said, 'You are far afield today?' It might be an innocent question, but he saw no reason for blind trust in anybody, least of all a party member. He parried carefully. 'But

not as far as you, Madam Wenya.' If she noticed the evasion she made no comment. Instead she remarked, 'Wenya is my family name of course, and most people here use it, but my married name is Stanley. I married an Englishman.' This was unexpected. Paul noted it for future thought. He said, 'I had heard you were a widow'. 'Yes', she nodded. 'My husband was an army officer on secondment to the army here. He died in the Congo when a detachment was sent from here to join in the fighting there.'

The thought of death is an embarrassment. Paul murmured something about a soldier's death for a soldier, and became aware of a piercing glance from eyes that immediately veiled themselves. Her tone was satirical. She said, 'Possibly. But one would prefer something nobler than aggressive warfare directed against Katanga, which seems to me to be about the only orderly portion of the Congo.'

Paul drew his breath in deeply. It was a remark that could bear several interpretations. He struggled with a sudden awful desire to laugh. It was the memory of young Kofi, appearing one morning with a huge rosette pinned to his shirt. 'It is my club badge', he explained gravely to questioners. 'A very exclusive club—very few members. To join you have to raise your hand and say "I have no opinion about Katanga".'

He said, 'You have children?' 'Three', she answered. 'Two boys, fairly close, and a smaller girl. They are at school in England. Mostly they spend their holidays with their English grandmother, who is very fond of them, and is too well bred to allow her embarrassment at their colour to become obvious.' There was no expression in her voice. Paul looked at her curiously. Each gambit seemed to land him in trouble, or the hint of trouble. He tried again. 'How do you manage the finances?—I mean with these new currency controls and so on.' She smiled. 'My husband was a comparatively wealthy man and all his possessions were in England. Hence it is easy to support the children there without complications. Likewise my father is also a comparatively wealthy man, so it is easy for him to support me here, again without complications.' Paul said, 'You are a fortunate woman, it seems'. 'Very', she replied. 'That is, if we are still discussing financial matters.'

There was nothing he could say to that. He was determined to remain cautious. The Volkswagen pulled steadily up the rise, and drew to a halt in the roadway. In the noon heat there was the silence peculiar to noon and the voice of a tiny stream reached them through the trees. Madam Rosalie said, 'I believe you grew up in this village. My father did too. He speaks of the river as it was then, a handsome stream flowing from three springs, shallow and broad and strong.' Paul nodded. 'In places', he said, 'It formed little cascades as it worked its way down to the valley. But now there are concrete channels for the springs, into the dam, and from there the water flows into pipes. It is all very modern and progressive.' Madam Rosalie laughed suddenly. 'And all that escapes is this tiny stream of living water.' She paused but not long enough to make it necessary for him to reply. She continued, 'Lately I have noticed many water snakes in the stream, black, brown, grey. They slither about quite freely but if they observe you, they hide in the tree roots. Yesterday there was a magnificent red snake, the biggest and brightest I have ever seen. It disappeared at a great speed. In the part of the country where I grew up they have a superstition that when the water snakes are active, it is because the water spirits are angry, and that means that disaster will follow.'

Paul climbed out of the small car. He said, with a smile, 'Fortunately quite a few of our superstitions are also dammed and channelled these days'.

He stood gazing after the little car as it scurried on its way. Fleetingly he thought of that unknown white man, killed in the Congo. The outside world drew closer for a moment.

But at Aku's house it was the inside world that was in evidence, very much so. Paul heard wrangling voices as he approached the main front room and when he paused in the doorway no one appeared to take the slightest notice of him. There was Aku there, and Thomas Agokoli, the assistant master, and Cousin Seth, who farmed the family lands for all of them, and two young men whom he recognized as bricklayers usually employed down in the valley. One of them was saying angrily, 'He gets the contracts because he is a party man, a big party man, that's why. And he exploits us, he grinds the faces of the poor. First it was work one day's trial without pay, then it's

three days' trial without pay. Now it's three days in every month. The pay doesn't come till the middle of the next month, and only for those still working. So you must work two weeks before the last month's pay arrives. Then if you leave, you get nothing for the two weeks. And the women labourers. You know what they have to do to keep their jobs.' The other chimed in, 'There are five foremen on that job, one real foreman, and four informers. They sit about all day, and do nothing. They mark down names in little books and tell the foreman who he must sack. Another thing. I went to the district office for a driving licence. They say, "You must pay so much". Yes, so much for the licence and so much, much more, for the officials. But still I don't get the licence.'

Seth appeared to be rejoicing in their misery. He said, 'Well, *you can't drive*'. 'Maybe', said the man heatedly, 'but when I went once before, to the white man, he didn't take money. He said, "— off, you — fool, *you can't drive*". But I kept my money.'

Seth grinned. 'Aha! Listen to them, the two that carried the banner in the torch-light procession for Independence. Now they talk so nicely of the white man, but then it was "Out with Imperialist Domination". Now you find the black communist can exploit you just as ruthlessly as any white capitalist, heh!' He slapped his hand against his thigh, and sprawled in the chair, clad only in the long cloth thrown toga-like across him and over one shoulder. He was big, big-muscled, and handsome, and could have been recognized anywhere for what he was, the local sex-bounder. But he was no fool, at least on matters that did not involve women.

Aku said frowningly, 'That is not fair, Seth. We are entitled to want self-rule, and we are also entitled to want good rule.'

The first speaker laughed bitterly. 'Good rule; and all *he* can do is to run truckling to the east, mortgaging the cocoa-crop to Russia. Borrowing money from Peking China. From Peking! And the Chinese workers eat only a cup of rice a day. We should be ashamed.'

Thomas Agokoli seemed to tense into a thin line inside his shirt. He said, 'You cannot speak of our leader like that. He is obtaining succour for us, in our need.'

Seth made a rude noise. He said, 'Succour in our need! All

he wants is to get a big name for himself, as big as his big swollen head. We should have cut ourselves off from this state, joined instead with our blood-brothers in Togoland. Then we might have received justice, might have achieved freedom.'

Thomas called out 'No!', but Seth went on. 'They tell me Olympio rode about Lome on a bicycle. Dare *he* do that, in the midst of his loving people?'

Thomas almost shrieked. 'He led us from bondage. He is our Messiah.' His voice was shrill, but Aku cut across it with the voice of the schoolmaster. He said, 'That will do, Thomas, I can respect your loyalty to the president, but I will not tolerate blasphemy in my house'.

There was a brief silence, then Seth said, 'Blasphemy! They teach it now, in most of the schools. They chant litanies to him.'

But the word 'schools' touched a strong chord in Aku's being. He had been rising, but now he sank back suddenly into his chair. He said sombrely, 'All sorts of schemes; thousands of pounds for this, thousands of pounds for that; and half the children in the village don't go to school.' Thomas cried out, 'That is the fault of the parents', and Seth countered swiftly, 'Good thing. At least they are saved from contamination.'

Paul spoke from the doorway. He felt a feeling of pity for Thomas, the dewy-eyed fanatic. Perhaps *he* had appeared thus to others a few years ago. He said, 'Thomas is right about the children. The parents want their labour. You can't appeal to them, not that type. The only thing is a government order, compulsory education for all. Then the parents will have to get along without the children's labour. Maybe that will shake them up, make them find better shorter ways of doing things. It is ridiculous the way a woman here prepares food for the table. She starts right from the beginning, from the harvesting, and takes it through all the processes in one inadequate kitchen. Set people free from all this unorganized toil and there will be time for many things, including school-going.'

Seth still wore a wickedly goading expression. He said, 'Ha! An advocate for collective farming.'

Aku's voice again predominated. He said curiously, 'I shouldn't have expected support for the government from you, Paul'. Paul replied evenly. 'I didn't speak of the government, but

of *a* government, any government.' He turned away then, waved a hand, and turned away, back to his own house. A wind had blown in from the outside world, a wind was stirring up in the inside world. He shivered at both.

The two children were already hard at work. They had cleared away the remnants of the old fence and were busily setting out the bundles of palings of split bamboo which Paul had prepared. They stopped only to wave as he entered his house. He placed his morning's purchases carefully in the kitchen, attired himself in Aku's shorts and went out to join them. It was noticeably hot, unusually hot for the time of the year. The midday sun glowered down and as he worked he felt himself grow swimmingly wet with sweat. But again he felt that sense of subtle satisfaction that he had first felt the day he worked on the road.

The structure was quite simple. He dug two narrow lines, closely parallel, and in these the children placed the upright palings, alternately in each line. After every six feet or so another operation took place. They bent the palings completely across the opposite lines so that they were interlaced. Then a paling was inserted horizontally, slowly slipping down about two-thirds of the height of the vertical palings. Then the operation was repeated, about a third of the height from the top, the palings being now bent back across their own lines, and another horizontal strut introduced. The tops were kept close by lianas twisted firmly round each paling in turn. Here and there the whole structure was strengthened by a sturdier upright of timber planted more deeply in the earth and lashed to the nearest palings.

They were deft and quick and followed closely on him as he performed the heavier work. Occasionally Ama coughed, a tiny purposeless cough. He asked, 'Have you a cold, Ama?' and she replied, 'I had a cold a couple of weeks ago and coughed very much. Now the cold has gone, but the cough stays for a long time. It is always like that.' He frowned. 'If it stays too long you must take some medicine.' She said lightly, 'Yes. I shall boil some bark from the monkey-bread tree.' He still frowned. 'But that is for fevers.' 'Yes', she said, still lightly, and absorbed in her work. 'But this is a kind of fever too.' He left it at that. Probably it was nothing to worry about. After all, he was not responsible

for these two.

After the fence came the hedge and again he had to work hard to keep ahead of them, breaking and turning the earth so that they could plant the slips of kpoti.

Sometimes Ama sang, light notes resting lightly on the air, as she quietly trilled old fables. Once she sang a lament, unself-conscious and lost in her work, a lament whose sad little cadence crept through the layers of afternoon heat like trailing white cool clouds.

The beast of night has trampled my fine fence.

The beast of night has trampled my fine maize.

I will call the hunters to slay the beast.

Then of the meat they will give me a haunch.

A haunch is mine, a haunch is mine.

For I have suffered from the beast.

I will call the hunters, I will call the hunters.

The beast of death has taken my dear father.

The beast of death has taken my dear mother.

What hunters can I call to slay the beast?

There will be no meat, there will be no meat.

Nothing is mine, nothing is mine.

Although greatly have I suffered from the beast,

What hunters can I call, what hunters can I call?

As the afternoon sun moved down the sky, they finished their task and Paul gazed round on a scene very different from that which had confronted him on his earlier arrival in the village. The rickety fence, the tangled undergrowth were gone. In their place stood the new bamboo fence, the budding hedge, the firm little gate. The beds were ready for the vegetables, and some of them Togbe had already planted. It was orderly and in its way beautiful. He said, 'Well, Saturday-born', for that was what Ama's name betokened. 'Are you pleased with your work?' She said, 'Oh, yes', eagerly and gazed round her happily. 'At home there is no garden, no fence. We just sweep it clean to the next hut.' She laughed. 'The next hut is very close.'

He said teasingly, 'Your name in a very old language is what they call a root word. From it grows a verb. The verb means that you are fond of people and they are fond of you.'

They were sitting now, the three of them, on the small flight of stone steps that led up to the house. They drank refreshing draughts of cool water from the clay chattis that stood in a row, to catch the breeze. Alale kept them filled with water which she had thoroughly boiled first, for Alale was very careful about such things.

Ama said eagerly, 'Yes, that is quite right. I am fond of many people and they are fond of me.'

Still in a teasing mood he said, 'And who are these people who are fond of you?'

She said, 'Why, Togbe of course, and the old man, my Elder Father, and Little Mother and the three small children. The little ones cry when I go away', she ended proudly.

Togbe was persuading the cat to drape itself round his shoulders. The cat obliged. It hung as though lifeless. Occasionally it twitched its tail.

Ama asked, 'Does my name mean anything in other languages?'

He said, 'Well, in England they have a little verse about the people who are born on various days. It says, 'Saturday's child works hard for its living'.

Ama nodded her head vigorously. 'That is right too', she said, even more proudly than before, 'I work very hard'.

'Come', said Paul. 'See what you have earned.' He led the way through the house into the kitchen. On the table stood the morning's purchases. One very large bundle tied up in a cloth and one small bundle similarly tied. 'Look', he said, in much the same way as Ama said it when she brought him tomatoes or avocado pears. He untied the cloth of the big bundle, carefully, and revealed wrapping after wrapping of good, white paper, till a large, roasted muscovy duck made its appearance on a cardboard dish. It was surrounded with rice, masses of rice, the grains light and clear, and heaped up portions of beans, long green beans and fat soya beans. It was a beautiful sight. He looked at it with satisfaction. The children stared in wonder. Togbe cautiously put out a hand and ran a forefinger slowly along the succulent duck. He licked the finger and a smile of joy spread over his face. He repeated the act happily. But Ama was still staring. 'Is it for us?' she asked. 'Yes', said Paul. He

enjoyed this feeling of paternal beneficence. 'It is your wages.' 'My wages', breathed Ama. Suddenly she began to tie up the bundle again, deftly and quickly. Paul said, 'Why are you tying it up again?' She paused and stared at him. 'Oh, it is very kind of you, Paul. My wages.' She gave a little crowing sound. 'I shall take it home now, before they prepare anything else.' She finished the tying swiftly. Paul said rather forlornly, 'I thought you would eat it here'. 'Oh no', she cried. 'Not here. We shall share with the others, the elders, and the three little ones.' She lifted the bundle carefully from the table. Her one thought now was to get home. Paul handed the smaller bundle to Togbe. 'This is gravy sauce', he said. Ama was gone in a flash, with Togbe trotting closely behind. Paul felt sadly flattened. He had intended sharing that supper with the children. Oh well, Alale would always give him something to eat.

❖ 6 ❖

Friday, as planned, was the opening day for the Nyitso Restaurant, and from early morning onward crowds of the villagers came and went. They had no reason to come and go. They simply came to stand by the newly planted hedge, staring across at the white-washed little building, and when they were tired of staring they went. Inside, Afua Tengey presided over the platters of rolls and cold food. Hot food would be brought up by the supplier-of-the-day shortly before noon when 'You Too Can Fly' might be expected to arrive. The utensils were all of local make. The calabash trees had yielded their large round fruits to provide bowls and plates. The Tsiguis had given up their gourds, strange bottle-shaped gourds. The large ones made serviceable drinking vessels. The smaller ones were split lengthwise to form spoons. Aku was delighted. It all seemed so wonderfully traditional.

Outside, three banners waved boldly in the air. One said, 'Grand Opening Day'. Another proclaimed, 'Everything Today Half Price'. The third announced 'Visitors Delightfully Welcomed'. Aku frowned over that. 'It doesn't sound quite right', he said. 'Shouldn't it be "delightedly welcomed"?' Paul smiled. 'Do you remember when I laughed at the notice "The Expect Tailor"? You said, "Of course Lagbe can spell. I taught him myself. His father put up that notice but Lagbe can't change it now because he is known for miles around as the Expect Tailor".' 'Of course', said Aku, 'I said, "The notice can be linguistically wrong but psychologically right".' 'Just so', said Paul, and Aku looked rather bewildered, but left it at that.

It was just before eleven o'clock and there was quite a little crowd gathered round the restaurant. Suddenly, simultaneously, everyone became aware of an unfamiliar sound in the air. For a little while, nobody commented. Then someone

cried, 'It's a lorry, coming up the hill'. Someone else cried out, in alarm, 'It must be the bus. But it's too early. The hot food hasn't come yet.'

They all listened again in dreadful silence, staring towards the valley. The sound grew louder, closer. Someone called out, 'It is a bus, but it's coming from the *plains*'. They all swung round and stared the opposite way. Distinctly now, the engine of the bus could be heard, panting a little as it approached the last climb, the little cluster of squat ridges that lay between it and the waiting crowd. Someone shrieked, 'Two buses at half-price. We shall be ruined.' Aku shouted out, 'Take down the notices. Take down the notices.' There was a sudden wild scurry of darting figures.

Within minutes the bus had chugged into sight. The owner apparently suffered from a religious problem with grammatical complications. The legend read, 'The Wages of Sin are Death'. The bus wandered on with a slightly bewildered air and came to a halt alongside the restaurant grounds. But two notices had vanished. 'Visitors Delightfully Welcomed' alone swung lazily between the trees.

Paul was consumed with mirth. He said, 'Aku, I commend your presence of mind.' But later on, when he entered the serving-room, he commended Afua's presence of mind even more. She was dispensing the orders with the cool aplomb of the born trader and as he stopped near by, a man, purchasing some rice cakes, said 'I suppose a place like this is pretty busy'. Afua spread out her hands. 'Sometimes', she said nonchalantly, 'Sometimes not. Have you not passed through here before?' The man said no, he had been surprised to find they could come this way. Apparently the news of the repaired road had reached the plains. He was an Indian, wheat-coloured against the other customers, with large mournful eyes. Afua said grandly, 'If you intend coming regularly, you must let us know. We can provide Indian dishes if you prefer them.' She passed on to the next customer, and Paul stepped outside. Afua had become an international chef in one stride. Once again he was consumed with mirth.

Nevertheless, there were many anxious moments till the unexpected bus was sent safely off, the passengers rather

puzzled at the size and friendliness of the crowd that gathered to wave them vigorously on their way. No sooner had 'The Wages of Sin are Death' vanished down the slope, than the notices were hoisted back into position, the dishes collected and cleaned, and the suppliers-extraordinary shanghaied into hastily preparing more cold food to replace that consumed. There was an air of enjoyable hysteria, and Afua glanced often and happily into the cash-box with its first gleaming collection of coins.

But by the time the expected bus arrived, everyone had sobered down and everything was splendidly and amazingly ready, including even the school band which broke into ferocious welcome as 'You Too Can Fly' chugged desperately up the last portion of the climb, drew to a halt in front of the entrance to the path and folded down its mudguards like tired wings. The passengers poured out, not only eager to eat at half-price, but eager to eat at any price. Driver Joe had imposed a relentless fast from the bridge all the way to Nyitso. Two or three passengers for intervening stops had been deliberately over-carried a couple of hundreds of yards beyond the boundaries of their villages, so that no one else could be tempted to default. So now they ate, and Afua presided beamingly while the helpers cleared up the gourd dishes; and all around the newly-planted hedge anyone who could possibly manage to be there stood and gazed from afar on the auspicious start to a great village enterprise.

PART 3



The Time of Suffering

❖ 7 ❖

The fifth season was late in coming and short in duration, but it came like a lion, a wild, roaring, ravening September lion. Fortunately, Aku remembered it just before it arrived. Perhaps it was the sight of Alale gazing thoughtfully heavenward one afternoon at a light bank of clouds low on the horizon before placidly continuing about her business that recalled his mind to the matter of the roof. Within minutes he went dashing into Paul's house, and commandeered his assistance. 'I've had a wonderful idea', he said eagerly. 'You remember helping me strip off the tiles and the timber from the roof above the bedrooms?' Paul nodded. The tiles had been built up into heaps, the timber stacked in piles. There they had remained ever since, while the three bedrooms rejoiced in unhindered communion with the sky above, a changing panorama of sky, now flushed with dawn, now brightly blue, now deepening into dusk, now richly dark with night, while stars twinkled afar off in the immensity of space. Aku had accustomed himself to it so quickly that he had ceased to notice it, although any other members of the household, permanent or temporary, sent many a nervous glance heavenward, and carefully, perhaps more carefully, continued their usual practice of closing all doors and shutters before settling down to sleep. Like all their kin, they found no companionship in the beauty and majesty of the night, only unease, the same unease that made them place their homes in groups, never in isolation.

Now Aku gave the matter vigorous thought. He said to Paul, 'You know, our house looks bigger than it is. Three bedrooms are not enough. When all the children are at home, and the two new babies, and perhaps friends, we find ourselves sleeping all over the house. So I thought that now that everything is prepared, so to speak, why not build another storey above the

bedrooms? Three more rooms. It would be splendid.' Paul nodded again. He foresaw some manual labour ahead of him, nor was he wrong. What Aku planned to do immediately, under the threat of approaching rain, was to throw a concrete floor over the bedrooms. Thereon, at greater leisure, he could build three more bedrooms.

As usual with Aku's plans, everything went with a wild swing. The carpenter arrived to place the timber shuttering in position, a lorry appeared a couple of times discharging sand and stone and cement, and long lines of reinforcing steel. Saturday morning saw Paul one of a party of seven that laboured from sunrise onward to fill a frightening amount of space with the shiny, sluggish mixture. To him and Aku fell the task of mixing the concrete on a square platform previously prepared, and mixing concrete by spade and muscle is back-breaking work. Long before it was finished Paul's whole mind had dissolved into streams of sweat. There wasn't even enough of it left to curse Aku's schemes and enthusiasms. They mixed the concrete and shovelled it into headpans which Alale and Afiba and Kofi balanced upon their heads, moving across to the bamboo ladders and ascending, slowly and perilously, to the top where awaited them the two bricklayers who had complained about the contractor in the valley. They were still unemployed and, though sure of food from their family lands, were glad of the chance of a casual job which would earn them a day's pay at least. So they tipped the grey mixture from the headpans and stirred, pushed, spread, and prodded it into position over and under and between the long bars stretching across the space that seemed to take so long to fill. They were brothers and known to everyone in their village by their nicknames, Zo-kaka and Zo-piapia, for the one walked straight and proudly, while the other always trotted hurriedly alongside on little feet that took little hurried steps.

It was dark before they finished, when Aku at last straightened his schoolmaster's back, and Paul threw down the spade from his pen-holding hand, and both of them groaned, while Alale, Afiba, and Kofi said nothing at all. They sat on the verandah wall by the kitchen in the silence of exhaustion and gazed up at their handiwork where the grey mixture lay gleaming in the starlight

and the long poles propping up the timber shuttering created a strange new forest in the courtyard.

Zo-kaka and Zo-piapia went off happily with their money, and presently Alale gave a deep sigh. 'At least the rooms will now be safe from the rain', she said. Aku also sighed. He said, 'I think we must not be in too great a hurry to build the other rooms'. He rubbed his aching back thoughtfully. It was Kofi who said idly, 'When the other rooms are built, how will we get up to them?' It was an electric question. They all sat up straight and gazed at the new, flat concrete roof. It covered the three bedrooms and their portion of the verandah that bordered the courtyard. There was no means of ascent to it except by the bamboo ladders standing amidst the props. Aku gave an uneasy laugh. 'We have left no place for a staircase', he admitted. 'I should have told the others that I intended to build on top. We shall have to make a staircase later on, and knock out a piece at the top.' He brightened visibly. 'Yes, that's it. The staircase can be on the verandah, and we'll just knock out a piece at the top.'

Fortunately he did not consult Paul, for Paul's attitude to the whole house at that precise moment was one of almost horrible malevolence. All he wanted to do now was to crawl home and cast his aching body on the kapok mattress.

But in spite of the irritation which Aku's ways could rouse in anyone not blessed with Alale's serenity of spirit, Paul found himself developing affection and respect for the thin, vibrating man. Underneath his sudden bursts of ruthless organizing, his testy impatience, lay a wide encompassing optimism and confidence in his fellow-man, an undefined but real belief that all would ultimately be for the best in the best of all ultimately possible worlds, and an equally undefined but real yearning to see his people equal the achievements of other peoples, both materially and spiritually. Yet 'undefined' remained the crucial word. Conversations with Aku tended to have an intangible quality. It was like shadow-boxing.

The sharing of the evening meal had become an accepted part of each day's programme. Sometimes, especially after Afiba and Kofi had returned to their boarding-school, there were visitors who stayed a few nights. Many of them were kinsfolk, the relationship being sometimes so distant as to be wellnigh non-

existent. To Aku they were all cousins. Sometimes there were callers from the village. The more crowded the long front room became, the wider was Aku's smile.

Once or twice there were just the two of them, for Alale had a variety of evening interests. She assisted with the evening course in adult education and domestic hygiene run by the Women's Council, and attended a Women's Christian Study Group run by the Church Council. Of this last activity Aku one evening grew critical to the point of hostility. 'Why a women's group?' he asked Paul testily. 'Why not just a study group for anyone? All this segregating of people into sections and classes and sexes. I've even had battles with people who want to interfere with my school. I'm a firm supporter of co-education. Men and women have to live together, work together. What better place for them to start than at school?' Paul nodded rather absently. 'The idea has its dangers', he observed. Aku snorted. 'Dangers. Of course it has. I am no supporter of the argument that because anything presents dangers that it must therefore not be undertaken. We must face dangers boldly. If we emerge victorious, we emerge as better, chastened people.' Paul nearly said 'If'. He changed it to 'Yes' instead. Unlike Aku he could not visualize human nature as one big happy family, but he was not a born controversialist, ready to take up the challenge on any and every topic simply for the joy of mental exercise.

Sometimes, while Aku argued fiercely with visitors of his mettle, Paul would find his mind wandering, back to his early writing days. He had not been argumentative then. He had merely accepted a line of thought and written in support of it, fiercely, yes, but with no hint of discussion or compromise. He had written as Aku sometimes spoke, not as the fencer who takes up the foil, but rather as the bandit who seizes a bludgeon. Death to the enemy.

How differently he wrote now, in the lamp-lit quietness of his kitchen, when all the village slumbered, as though the dim light somehow gave him a vision of wondrous clarity. The laughter in Alale's eyes, Aku's bony shoulders under the tunic, the litheness of Madam Rosalie's walk, Togbe's finger sliding along the duck, Ama's little feet pattering down the road, the wrinkles in the face of the old woman who plodded up the road every morning

at the same hour, the lazy muscular strength of Seth. All these things he could see, and see behind them too, all the influences that had come together to make them. Creation. The same process seemed to work within him. He had seen before, but as though through a glass, darkly. Now he saw clearly. Ideas formed, of a tenderness that was strange and absorbing. Not that the words came easily now. They struggled in their birth as babes do, and left behind them exhaustion and a wondrous peace, as babes do.

He preferred Aku in reminiscent mood. Twenty years older than Paul, and keenly interested in local affairs, he could combine his own experience and the tales that had been told to him by his elders. Once he described in detail the building of the first church, a church of swish, with thatched roof built in those early days of warfare and uncertainty. 'The people gave God their trust then, for it was not a time to build a church at all', said Aku in a low voice. 'And with the building of the second church—this big, sturdy one—they gave their toil.' Of this event he spoke from his own recollection. A small child then, he played his small part, and as he spoke now the village again became filled with sound, the sound of the stones breaking in the quarry, the slow footsteps, as the long line filed by, each bearing a heavy stone balanced securely on head, the sharp notes of rough tools, that fixed each stone into position, the hammers on the roof timbers, the brittle sound of sliding tiles, the creaking sound of straining ropes, the deep human sigh as the great bell was slowly swung into position and uttered its first clear commanding call across Nyitso and across the forests where the cocoa tree was still something of an interloper.

'They speak of a temple raised in Jerusalem without sound', said Aku. 'But our church was not like that. It was raised with noise and clamour and song and laughter. That is right, because that is what we are, a people of noise and song. Our church is of us.' He was tensed, his face sharp and eager. He said, 'Sometimes I want the bell to come down. It is not of us. I would call the people to prayer with the drums, the talking drums of our ancestors.'

It was so unexpected that Paul this time was stirred to discussion. He said, 'Aku, is it wise to identify religious beliefs with

national aspirations?’

‘No! No!’ Aku cried in response. ‘You do not understand me. It is that so many of these Christian customs are foreign to us. We cannot absorb them. We must absorb Christianity, make it of us, identify it with *our* customs. Then, when we have absorbed it sufficiently, suddenly we will grow, we will develop. In the pageantry of nations we shall take the cue at the right time, play our appointed part.’

Paul frowned. Suddenly he was keenly interested in this debate, forgetful of the Sunday mornings he slumbered, while the village was in church. He said, ‘Some people think great development must precede Christianity, that it requires orderly patterns of living and increasing manifestations of intelligence before it can really be accepted. That it requires a degree of mutual awareness and of imagination before it is comprehensible. What degree of imagination can you expect to find here, where everyone moves and toils and thinks in close proximity to the hot soil? Imagination does not thrive too near the soil. It is an epiphytic plant.’

Now he became aware of bewilderment in Aku’s face, a pausing before the door that led to unfamiliar thought. A surge of impatience again. Aku was two-dimensional. The whole village was two-dimensional. They were hewers of wood and drawers of water. How was it that he was different? Had he received special gifts, or was it simply that years of correct feeding and freedom from disease had released his mind from the more usual and dreadful bondage to the body? It was a frightening thought—the power of circumstance.

To Aku therefore he spoke more quietly. He said, ‘Drums in themselves are neither good nor bad. But all round us they are associated with pagan things, sometimes evil things. Associate them with an uplifting belief and there is danger that to the weaker ones they will seem to equalize the uplifting and the degrading. So many times our people have been accused of “slipping back”’.

‘Exactly’, said Aku, almost with triumph. ‘They slip back. But I say it is because the new belief has not become part of them. It has remained a “foreigner”.’

Paul was surprised at his own interest and tenacity in the

discussion. He said, 'Aku, Christianity is always a foreigner, wherever it arrives, to none more so than to the bands of Jews and Romans who first accepted it. Its function is not to sanctify national customs but to disrupt them, to sort the good from the evil and to destroy the evil. If not, there is no point in its coming at all. Besides, Christianity is not a national thing; it is an individual thing; its real meaning is for the individual, only incidentally for the nation.'

Aku's expression had reflected a variety of changing thoughts as Paul spoke. Now he perforce abandoned the discussion, or rather postponed it until such time as he could have completed a process of mental digestion. He said, rather sadly, 'Paul, I cannot visualize a world of individuals'.

Perhaps Aku had been responding unconsciously to vibrations in the air, vibrations that daily grew in power and strength, till they conquered hearing and passed into the brain. On all sides, the drums were beating, down in the valleys and away over the plains. Deep, throbbing notes and fierce insistent crescendos; their voices rose in wild chorus, surging through the forests and hovering over the rivers, a heavy, pulsating monotonous rhythm, a rhythm that mesmerized into semi-insensibility or again urged to frenzied reaction.

It was festival time, harvest time. In the pagan groves the juju-men flung themselves into wild dances that prepared the way for wilder feats. They danced in flames, leapt into cactus groves, smashed bottles over their heads and thrust into their bodies knives that left no wounds. They drank great draughts of sorabi and smeared their faces and bodies with palm oil and maize flour. To the frenzied song of the drums they danced in frenzied dance. They buried each other in sorabi-sodden graves and crawled forth, to caress their skins with blazing straw.

It was festival time, harvest time, the time of reunion of the living and invocation of the dead. The yam came forth from the earth. Throughout the land, the people carried their 'souls' in triumph through the streets, 'souls' dwelling in the great crowns worn by tiny boys who gazed solemnly down from the palanquins jostling high above the heads of the crowds. They poured libations to their ancestors, the Stool Priests pouring wine from the calabashes, calling, pouring, waiting; calling for

the dead to listen, waiting for the dead to listen.

There was drumming and dancing and merry-making. In one place the gods of plenty were honoured by the parade of twins and triplets, behind them the massing crowds of people in the cleansing ceremony of carrying symbolical refuse from their homes to the bush. In another, they sprinkled the festival dish of maize and palm wine for the dead to eat, asking for peace and plenty in the coming year.

In the groves they poured libation to the seventy-seven gods for long life; on the shores they poured libation for the fetish of the sea to provide fish in plenty; across the plains they carried great tubers of yam, and sang and danced to the firing of muskets. In the halls of the dead rulers, they purified the Black Stools with eggs and beaten yam.

There were days of cleaning and weeding, days of mourning and wailing, days of feasting and singing; days when the New Yam was carried into the towns with calling to the spirits of the wise dead to follow it.

Whether they came to honour the harvest, to honour the dead, or to reunite with the living, they came together into their own towns, and all joined in the final ceremony, when chiefs and queen-mothers were borne through the streets in swaying ornate palanquins and then sat in state to receive homage from their people. Then were brought out the Kwagyam drums, the drums of Kwagyam the hunter who made them from the ears of an elephant that drowned in a lake. And from this a lesson can be learned, that a lake may be motionless yet it can drown an elephant.

Then come the talking drums and the gong-gongs. And finally the whole fontonfrom ensemble is ready. The drummer invokes the drum, Oh Wood, hold fast, Oh Ropes, brace yourselves, Oh Elephant Skin, make ready, Oh Pegs, stand firm, Oh Sticks, play well. The gong-gong player fills the air with sounding and clashing and the drums follow, throbbing and pounding, vibrating across the plains and up the hills, through the forests and over the farmlands, till they conquer hearing and pass into the brain.

Sometimes Aku thought wistfully of the festivals. It would be good to have a 'harvest home' in Nyitso. Where was the

harm? Many Christian communities took part in them. In some places they even rounded off the week-long festival with a service of thanksgiving in the church. The blending of old and new. Where was the harm? But he did not discuss this with Paul, for he felt that Paul had stepped beyond Nyitso and beyond the voice of the drums. Paul was an individual.

Yet Paul himself was conscious of combined unease and exhilaration during these weeks. Tension was heightened by the rains. They came like a lion, a wild, roaring, ravening lion. At one moment the noon sun held sway, savagely fierce above the shimmering earth. The next moment, the aggressors were there, rolling clouds of black fury that filled the sky, pouring down on the earth liquid masses of furious rain. So it was, every day, the afternoons falling before the onslaught of the rains, the mornings filled with steaming vapour that followed the path of the drums and crept into the brain. At night the rains withdrew, leaving a darkness that was hot and moist. Sometimes then he would stroll through the clusters of houses, with a sense of release from the afternoon imprisonment which the rains imposed. The valley did not call. There, he would feel even more enclosed than up here in the tree-shrouded village; but two or three times he followed the rising ground through the trees to points from where he could look out across the plains. They looked wide and empty in the starlight. It would be hot down there in the plains where they grew cotton, yet somehow the thought of cotton seemed cool and clean, unlike the moist, rich smell of the cocoa farms. Groundnuts, too, growing in the sandy soil. 'Plant me groundnuts, but not maize.' The love phrase of the countryside; for maize may be reaped completely but the groundnut never disappears from the soil where it has once been planted. The watercourses would be filling now with the rains, carrying salt down into the lagoons, and when the lagoons shrank in the dries, the great stretches of salt would emerge slowly into the dry heat, white, crackling salt. Up here it was tense and humid, the rains beating fiercely against the westward-facing slopes, the trees massed into legions. Down there it was a different world, drier if hotter, and wind-swept rather than rain-tormented, with the trees standing solitary like fierce sentinels, fierce trees, tredzos, filled with poisonous white juice

that could blind the eyes; date palms motionless in the breathless air, and cocoanut palms. Areas of menacing elephant grass, patches of voracious bamboo.

So, one day, driven by the festival drums and the rains, Paul went down into the plains. Yet if he escaped tension in one direction, he encountered it in another. In Nyitso it was possible to forget politics. The people lived close to the soil, and their thoughts were chained to it. But, though a demanding ruler, it was rewarding too. In the plains the people had taken a step away from the soil. They spoke more of progress, development, education. In the towns they spoke of politics, above all of politics, for this was an area on whose acquiescence the central government could not entirely rely. Years ago they had lived under German rule, then under a British mandate. Now they were incorporated into a new state, an emerging state, and the central government wished to hold the reins strongly in its own hands. These were people who had learned to work and learned to think, and a certain independence of thought characterized them. They spoke critically of government policies, and bitterly of government neglect, rather illogically in the same sentences. They mentioned with amusement the recognized fact that visitors of international importance were never brought into their midst, not even the royal guest from England. They spoke with anger of rising prices and food shortages.

Yet today they had no cause to complain of government neglect, for uniforms were everywhere. The navy blue of the duty police, the khaki and blue and red of the escort police. Not long before, a new reserve had been established there; there had been parades through the streets. Then came the troops, some of them bled in the Congo, and a regional branch of the army was established.

But today they put aside most of these thoughts for today was the close of the festival. From early morning onward they poured into the streets, carrying great tubers of yam, and traditional objects of veneration, and later they crowded into the durbar grounds where their chief sat in state and received the homage of the divisional chiefs. They abandoned themselves to dancing and drinking and drumming.

For a time Paul wandered idly amongst the jostling crowds.

From a street-side bar he watched the revellers and the uniforms, and thought 'The rule of force, or the rule of riot. When will we achieve the rule of law?' But a sojourn in the bar made the revelling more attractive and blurred the uniforms. They were dancing in the streets, the dances of old cults. The onlookers clapped their hands in rhythm and swayed, and the drums beat, far and near. From the street-side bar he moved to another, more sophisticated, where table and benches stood in the shade of mango trees, and where they served imported liquor, undoubtedly smuggled. There was a youthful group near by, jiving in the modern, western way. He tapped his feet to their rhythm, and felt carefree and alive. It was almost as good as Accra. A girl grasped his hand and shouted 'Come on, Mister, dance'. She was young and lithe, dressed in western clothes. Her straightened hair was piled up on her head into lacquered coils. It remained miraculously stationary through all her gyrations. He danced and jived with the best of them, feeling young and carefree and alive. And when he tired, he quenched his thirst with palm wine which didn't agree too well with the imported liquor, so that presently a dragon inhabited his bloodstream, a roaring, smoke-belching dragon that pawed and rushed its way into every vein in turn.

The afternoon gave way to night, and each partner gave way to another, and presently he was inside a night-club, where a wailing saxophone emitted music that coiled through the smoke and beckoned to the dragon and both of them brought him to his feet, and sent him moving softly, swayingly, round the room, clasping a half-drunk woman who came from nowhere and looked like nothing on earth. Perhaps she was a female dragon, calling to the one that was rushing up and down his bloodstream. He began to giggle at the thought, and the woman rested her head on his shoulder, and moved against him to the wail of the saxophone.

It was still dark when he awoke on the hillside, the dawn was not yet at hand. His head ached and his body ached, and though the dragon was still with him, it had grown rather weary and bored. He was fully clothed and his wallet, for what it was worth, was still in his pocket. He must have got this far by his own volition. He cleansed his head and his mouth in a brimming

watercourse, and grimaced at the effort. Around him the wind whispered eerily across the plains, and above him the stars peered down from a hazy sky. Beyond lay the rising road to Nyitso, the repaired road. Wearily he began the long climbing walk to Nyitso, but as he walked the fumes began to clear and the aching to lessen, and the feeling of jubilation began to return. He had been too long immured in the village. One could go mad, immured like that. So he talked to himself and once or twice he laughed, startling little nocturnal animals who paused to let him go by. Once he stopped as he encountered a civet on the path. In the darkness it seemed bigger than it really was. But it shuffled on its way, and he sighed with relief. Once he nearly stepped upon a Togo-hare. It dashed off at a great pace, a swishing noise rushing through the short grass. The sky was paling when he reached the cluster of ridges, passed the new restaurant, so simple next to those in the outer world, passed through the village and reached his own home. He felt disinclined then to go indoors and sat down on the grassy bank on the opposite side of the road where the tall trees still held the night in their shadows. The road was a pale ribbon of dawning light threaded through the trees and above it was visible a strip of sky. A solitary star hung in clear view, the rest were caught in the trees. His head was clear now, and the dragon slumbered, but the feeling of jubilation persisted. He could have proceeded on to another day of revelry, without hesitation.

The dawn sky paled but the lone star was steadfast, and Ama came walking slowly up the road. She was clad in a new dress, the short moulded tunic outlining a figure that looked strangely mature, freed from the shapelessness of the youthful school uniform. The long skirt swayed gracefully as she moved, and her feet wore the toe-gripped sandals. He watched her as she approached and he thought, 'Ama is not a child at all. She is a woman.'

Presently, as she came up the road, she saw him seated on the grass bank. She stopped and smiled. It was a beautiful smile that illumined all her face and showed in the eyes that were large in the thin face. He said to her, 'I have not seen you for many days', and she replied proudly, 'I have finished the school course, Paul, and tomorrow I start work in the valley. I shall go

down there every day and shall be a seamstress. I have a new dress.' She paced slowly up and down the road, so that he could admire the dress. 'Why are you up so early, Paul?' He said lazily, 'I am not early. I am late. I have just arrived home, from the plains. I have been dancing.' He was standing on the bank now, looking down at her. She said eagerly, 'You can dance, Paul, the modern dancing?' He sprang down into the road, filled still with jubilation. He said, 'Dance? Nothing to it.' He raised his arms, clasping an imaginary partner to him, and swayed slowly along the road, crooning, 'My Labadi baby. Oh, my Labadi baby', till she laughed aloud and clasped her hands. 'And this is the high-life', he boasted, reeling and turning in the rhythmic steps while he clapped his hands for music. She laughed again as she watched him. 'I can do that', she cried in excitement, and they danced opposite each other in the road, up and down the road, to the music of their own clapping.

Then suddenly she stopped and the breathlessness passed into a spasm of coughing, that seemed to twist right through her till she sat down on the grassy bank, and breathed again.

Ama wore earrings, graceful gold earrings. He said, 'Those earrings are very old. Where did you get them?' She answered 'Yes, they are old, they come from my own mother. But where she got them I do not know.' She glanced up the road. 'I must not be late.' Then she said, happily, 'I like the songs for the new dances. I should like to be clever and make one up.' He said scornfully, 'Clever? There's nothing to it. Just take a lot of words and string them together like beads, stick a tune through them and there you are.' She had turned to go but she turned back, fascinated by the thought. 'Could you make one up, Paul?'

'Of course', he said. The jubilation made him feel all-powerful. 'Stick in the sky and the moon and the palms and there you are. Now, let's take a place. Give me a name.' He paused, frowning. 'Avetili', she suggested. It was the name of one of the villages in the valley. He frowned even more thoughtfully. 'Over Avetili there's a moonlight sky', he began musingly, then paused. 'No. Make it a midnight sky. Then, over Avetili there's a moon rides—no!—sails high.' The pause was longer. 'Down in Avetili the palm trees sigh.' He came to a halt this time, but suddenly ended triumphantly, 'Who's in Avetili?—just you and I'. And as

he said the absurd little lines, an absurd little row of notes was running through his brain. For a moment he hummed them softly to himself. Then he broke into song,

'Over Avetili there's a midnight sky,
Over Avetili there's a moon sails high.
Down in Avetili the palm trees sigh.
Who's in Avetili?—just you and I.'



Ama's Song

He threw back his head and laughed aloud. 'There', he said to Ama, 'Of all the corny songs ever written, you've just heard the corniest.'

But Ama didn't think so at all. Her eyes were lustrous. 'I think it's beautiful, Paul—so clever, all the words strung together, like beads.' 'It's yours', he said grandly, 'A necklace of beads, a necklace of words, for you.' The sky was light now, but it was still dark beneath the trees. He said slowly, 'A necklace for your earrings'. He reached out a hand and gently touched the dancing earrings. He said slowly, 'Gold from the hot earth. Gold for Ama.' Her face was stilled in surprise but her eyes were still

lustrous. She was not a child at all. She was a woman. And suddenly the dragon roared awake again, roared right through him, roared and pawed and belched smoke into the dawn air, and there was fear in Ama's eyes. Fear in Ama's eyes. He shouted then, shouted above the roaring of the dragon, 'Go! Go! Get away from me! Stay away from me!', and Ama fled up the road, her feet pattering in the new sandals, while the dragon seized Paul in its claws, seized, shook and tore at him, till at length it threw him down, on the ground, inside the bamboo fence.

Togbe did not come that day. There were many days and still Togbe did not come. Till one morning, Paul sat again on the grassy bank and presently Ama came walking in the dawn light, up to the village where the buses came frequently now, on the repaired road, and bore people off to the valley. She stopped opposite him and he said, 'Togbe does not come to the garden anymore'. He remained seated on the bank, and she stood on the road. She said quietly, 'Togbe has been ill with fever. He is better now.' Paul said, 'He must come again to the garden and you must come. There is nothing to fear—the dragon is dead.' She was a little puzzled at that but she made no comment. She said, 'Togbe is better now. He will soon come again.' There was something about her now that recalled the timidity she had shown at their first meeting. But it was no longer timidity. It was something new, something mature, a reserve. Paul said, 'I should like to tell you something that you will not learn in my cousin's classes. Stay away from a man that has drink on his breath.' She sighed then. 'That I already know', she said, and waved to him as she went on her way, waved in the manner of the area, as though gently shining an invisible surface.

Paul sat on the bank and stared after her and saw again the fear in Ama's eyes, strange fear in a land where the river of desire often flows more strongly in the woman even than in the man. Yet every land has its invisible temples, secret temples, where tinkling bells send out an inaudible message to the chosen ones, so that they dance always a slow, secret dance to the sound of the tinkling bells, a dance of devotion in the pure clear shadows of the secret temples.

Togbe came again. He came again daily, but Ama did not come again. She was working now, a seamstress in the valley. In

the morning she went down by bus and in the evening she returned by bus. There were many buses coming now, and the communal labour continued working on the road for many Mondays as the traffic and the rains showed the weaknesses in the road. Madam Rosalie consulted Paul about a plan for having a petrol station in the village. The restaurant was doing well, surprisingly well. Soon Afua needed a full-time helper and then it was decided to open on Sundays. There was some acrimonious discussion about this, and the village divided sharply into two groups, one, much the smaller, headed by Aku, who felt that the Sabbath should preside in peace over Nyitso. He was defeated by the march of progress, and one morning soon thereafter, Paul was amused to be awakened by the sound of singers, lustily giving forth in the road. It was the age-old custom of celebrating a victory by the singing of triumphant songs in the ears of the defeated. The music was old but the words were new, words that advised Aku to accept defeat gracefully and capitulate to the desires of the progressive majority. Aku was not in the least put out. At the evening meal he commented rather loftily on the stupidity of some of the old customs. 'Tradition', said Paul wickedly, then repented and said, 'Well, modern services cannot come to an abrupt halt on a Sunday. What about hospitals, for instance?' Aku nodded. 'Quite true. We must move with the times. The restaurant must open on Sundays. Especially'—and he cheered up completely—'as we are making such good profits.'

Ama did not come again. She was thinner and she coughed a great deal. The vapours from the rains hung heavily under the trees and made many people cough. She was earning wages, and Togbe appeared resplendent in a new shirt. Paul one day took a piece of paper and on it he wrote down the words of the stupid little song he had composed for Ama. Now he did not think it stupid, he was growing quite passionately attached to it. The tune hummed through his head when he tried to settle down to writing, so that he had to turn aside to attend to it, and to write it down instead. It took quite some time to transfer it from his head on to the paper and under the words.

Next morning Paul sat again on the grass bank and presently Ama came walking in the dawn light up to the village. She

stopped opposite him and he said, 'I have brought you the necklace'. He gave her the paper and Ama read the words and looked at the music written below. She cried out in delight. 'Look! You can write with words and you can write also with sounds.' Her eyes were lustrous again. He had written the musical notation of the rippling melody only. The rest of it he did not know how to compose. But her words made him feel immensely learned, and at ease again. He could not explain the sensation of peace he had felt as he watched her walk up the road under the solitary star. She was like the star, a small, glowing light. He said, 'When you come up the road, there is a star above you. I think of you always like that. You are the morning star.'

She smiled then. It was a beautiful smile, but her eyes were demure. She said, 'Paul, I have learned in your cousin's classes that the morning star is in the eastern sky. This is the western.' He said calmly, 'If I want the morning star to shine in the western sky, then there it shall be'. She laughed and waved, and went on, carrying with her the piece of paper.

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The festivals died away, but the afternoon storms continued, heavy black clouds pouring down the furious rains. It was a bad time. The rains brought tension and sickness. Paul began to notice the snakes. Perhaps Madam Rosalie's words had stayed at the back of his mind, that activity amongst the water snakes presaged disaster. Occasionally he would wander across to the tiny stream and a few minutes, silence and stillness would bring a return of activity in the water, glimpses of brown in the muddy pools at the sides, black and grey gliding swiftly to the safety of the tree-roots, a flash of golden throat, or scarlet vest.

But activity was not confined to the water snakes, nor was Paul the only one to notice. Frequently there were clusters of tiny worm snakes, no less frequent was the sight of poisonous, burrowing vipers, and after three of the villagers had reported terrifying encounters with giant vipers, communal labour was directed to widening and brushing the bush-paths which led to the farmlands, to the stream, to the graveyard. To the knowledgeable, the appearance of these snakes indicated the widespread incursion of the rains into underground retreats. To the others they brought recurrences of fading superstitions, and the sight of a magnificent python coiling his way between the fringing forest and the last clusters of huts caused many a whispered remark and many a fearful glance to the coast where fetish priests were still known to serve the all-powerful god-snake. Thus, while they feared the danger that was the result of danger, they forgot the real danger that was the cause of the visible danger.

In the darkness of the earth, the great rains fed the springs till they gushed forth in power and turned and poured along the confining concrete channels. But where once they could have spread out into a sweeping river, now they tumbled and churned

within the walls of the man-made dam. Some poured hissing through the pipes and taps of the modern houses, some rushed through the release gates into the tiny stream which daily grew in size and strength. But still, within the walls, the water tumbled and churned and rose in fury, higher and higher, against the man-made prison. Till the dam broke.

Constable Akaga was the first to realize the impending disaster, and for a moment stood petrified by the sheer unfamiliarity of the threat. For Nyitso, from the constable's point of view, was a dull, unrewarding place, where a talented constable could go mad seeking for equal talent among the local criminals. For months now he had put in a daily attendance in the village, and for months had been confronted with crime of a very low order, quarrels that got out of hand, petty pilfering, accusations of juju. Very few of these cases merited the attention of the magistrate's court in the valley, depressingly few.

In his spare time he studied languages. This started almost by accident. An article in the *Daily Pennant* about the advisability of closer contact with French-speaking neighbouring territories, and the need for police co-operation, made him aware of the possibilities that might lie open to a French-speaking constable such as himself, himself after conquering the language that is. He purchased a little set of books called *Learn French at Your Ease*. He provided himself with a neat shelf for his private use in the tiny police office, and placed the books upon it. Quite soon after that a large photograph in the same paper displayed the smiling faces of a band of riot-squad police who were to study suitable techniques in Eastern Germany. He hastily purchased another little set of books called *Learn German at Your Ease*. A few more weeks and the announced departure of yet another group to study certain aspects of crime detection caused the appearance of another set, called *Learn Polish at Your Ease*. He would also, by this time, have purchased *Learn Russian at Your Ease*, had not the heavy rains prevented the delivery of the paper to the area over a period in which another band of eager, smiling faces was shown against a background dominated by a waiting Ilyushin aeroplane.

Every morning he walked steadily up the long road, pushing a bicycle, on which he would spin down in the evening. Arriving

at the police office, he would divest himself of his tunic and proceed to sweep and dust the office and then to sweep the small, railled-off area round it. Although he performed this task faithfully, he considered it degrading and every month or so would write a letter to one of the newspapers in which he would complain that sweeping was no part of a constable's real duties.

Thereafter he would note the date at the head of the page prepared for recording the day's events, and presently he would set off on a long leisurely walk through and around the village, sometimes proceeding a little farther afield into the farmlands or the forest. This morning his walk took him, as it sometimes did, along the path that led back to the village from the dam. As he passed below the dam wall the sound of water was in his ears, water pouring gustily from the release gates into the stream bed. But today the sound seemed to have overtones, and as he paused and glanced along the wall he suddenly perceived a gleaming line of water, small but steady and strong, seeping from a spot low down the wall. Even as he watched, the seepage increased in volume and then his startled eyes perceived what appeared to be a jagged crack. For a moment his mind refused to apprehend the meaning of that ominous crack and he even closed his eyes so as to give them a clearer, refreshed sight of it. When he opened them, the crack seemed higher, the water stronger. Another moment, and it seemed higher still. Akaga suddenly found himself rushing along the hillsides, jumping down the slopes where he could.

As he ran he saw a man and a boy by the stream side. It was Paul with Togbe. He shouted hoarsely, 'The dam is cracking', and tore on, and down, to where a cluster of mud huts stood pathetically in the path of the menacing water. Paul paused only to grasp Togbe's arm and he was running too, running and jumping down the rough terraces of the hillsides, seeming scarcely impeded by the boy's smaller steps, so that he arrived at the cluster on the heels of the constable. They dashed in and out of the huts, shouting the alarm at the top of their voices and as the message beat through the air, the occupants came running out, shouting too, shouting and screaming for all to hear that the water was coming, coming back into its own. Mothers seized babies and young people hustled the old and they all poured up,

away from the huts, up to the safety of the road. There they stood, crowded together and tense after the near-panic of the last few moments. They looked back on the deserted huts and, above, they could see the gleaming wall of the dam, such a small dam, so small that it could only supply adequate water for twelve hours a day; and now grown into a wild, threatening peril. Even at this distance they could now see the line of seepage up the wall.

The constable was nowhere in sight. He was still running and jumping down the path of the water that still struggled to break its prison, still running and calling aloud to people in the farmlands and on the bush paths.

On the road the group waited and stared. Someone said, 'It cannot hold much longer', and someone sobbed, 'It will pass over all the new crops down there'. The voice roused Paul to sudden new fear. He shouted out, 'If it breaks in a wide flow, it can cause a landslide, bring down half the hillside'. Someone said, 'Yes, look at the huts above'. Their glances swept up together. Near the dam and above the line of descent of the water lay a group of houses on the edge of a steep drop. A landslide would undermine them, leaving them hanging in the air. Paul yelled, 'If we channel it, it may not do so much damage'. He left Togbe then and ran, and they ran with him, men and women alike, leaving the very old and the very young in the safety of the road. They seized hoes and machetes and spades and anything else that came to hand. Below the dam they worked furiously, throwing up banks alongside the old river bed. It was a magnificent effort, although too late to be completely effective. Yet it did serve to take the first mighty blow of the water.

A watcher screamed out a warning and they all left the new banks and rushed away to rising ground. Then they waited, in silence, in a long silence, such as Nyitso had never known.

Then the wall broke. A flood of roaring water seemed to leap out of the slope, it seemed indeed to the watchers to hang in the very air. Then with a spine-chilling roar, it crashed into the waiting river bed, clutching greedily at the new banks as it passed and which sent it boiling downhill in a whirl of water which cut its way in a straight line, boring through the heart

of the new crops, before it spread out, leaping and rushing down the slopes.

As the water fell, Togbe screamed. He closed his eyes in fear at the sight and opened his mouth wide and a scream of terror came from his lips so loud that it reached up into the sky above all the other screams and all the sounds.

The land held. There was no sliding. The huts above were safe. But those below surrendered to the water. As it bit through the mud-brick walls, the little structures seemed to sink slowly to their knees and then to fall forward into the water, and the crops in the path of the fury fell, as though a great scythe had swung through them.

There were six deaths, only six, thanks to the speed with which the warning was given. These were the ones whom the warning did not reach. Instead the water reached them first, plucked at them greedily, and flung them into the churning mass. Among the six was Constable Akaga, who died, as they recorded on the appropriate page, under the appropriate date, in the 'course of duty, loyally performed'. His photograph appeared in the *Daily Pennant*, an eager, smiling face under a policeman's cap, against a background of blue sky. Akaga took with him no colleagues on his journey into a far-off territory whose language has not yet been reduced to a handful of lessons which you may learn at your ease.

Nyitso buried its dead, and the sound of mourning filled the village. All night, the bell tolled mournfully in the square church-tower, and wailing rose up to join its echoes. The word had passed along the valleys and through the plains, and all morning the kinsfolk arrived. Sometimes they came in the little buses that chugged up the hillside, proceeding on the downward run nearly empty; sometimes on foot in silent groups. The women wore their long, flowing skirts and the moulded tunics. The men wore their kentes, slung toga-like over the shoulder. They wore their finest and their darkest, and they came to give their last greeting to their kin.

In the late afternoon, in a slow drizzle of rain, for the day's storm had mercifully ended, the long processions set out from each of the stricken homes, to the main road of the village and to the open grass around the church, from where they passed on,

one behind the other, five processions of sorrow, one procession. Amidst them they bore their dead, five dead, cloth-wrapped, laid in coffin or on bier. As the mourners walked, they sang, and a great wail of mourning rose into the air. Sometimes they sang the Christian hymns, sometimes they sang the older lamentations. They walked and sang, and bore their dead to the graveyard, a graveyard like a great green cathedral, where the mounds were heaped among the tangled tree-roots and overhead was a living roof of leaves. Each mourner bore a square of cloth, a token of presence at the mourning to form a mound of their own, each piece of cloth a witness to the presence of a mourner, each piece a farewell from the living to the dead. The sounds of mourning died away into the silence of the night.

But later that night, when Paul finally sat alone in his darkened house, he thought neither of the mourning, nor of the flood. He thought of Togbe and how he had screamed as the wall gave way. Togbe had screamed. He was not voiceless. He never spoke because he never heard. There were places where deaf children could be taught to speak. Perhaps he was not really deaf either. Perhaps an operation could be performed, treatment given; perhaps Togbe could be given his hearing, or hearing sufficient to give him the full use of speech. One heard of such things. He must find out where such a thing could be done, find out a doctor skilled in such knowledge. Perhaps it would be necessary to send Togbe abroad, to Europe. He must find out how much it would cost. He would write more, write much better, dig more money out of the old vulture, Reuben. Perhaps he could unlock the door of Togbe's silent world. Meanwhile, yes, meanwhile. The idea came to him suddenly. It was so simple that he wondered why it had not come to him before. Meanwhile, he would teach Togbe to read and write. Yes, teach him first to communicate with the articulate world by means of symbols scratched on paper. Of course, it would take time, time to gather the information and the money. There would be other demands on his toil and his generosity, especially now, after this disaster. But he was filled with optimism. 'Time! Well, that's one commodity there's plenty of, in Africa', he said aloud.

THE TIME OF SUFFERING

He retired then to sleep, and perhaps to dream. It was strange that in his dreams lately, he never saw himself leaving the village; somehow its joys and its sorrows had become his. A rather ridiculous village, really, where the morning star shone in the western sky and a shadow appeared for a moment on a ribbon of road.

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Nyitso's agony was not yet ended. After the great rains, and the great flooding wave that passed over the hillside, came, ironically enough, a shortage of water. The springs that had hitherto come together to form the river now flowed sluggishly along the broken concrete channels that led to the dam. Through the breaks, half the water drained away in useless little pools, before it reached the main point. Even from there, though it was held for some distance within the old bed by the banks so hastily thrown up, it showed a tendency to spread and wander and lose itself in thin lines of twisting water. There was a sudden cessation of the storms, the springs too seemed suddenly to decrease in volume. It was as though a demon inhabited the water, denying a share to the villagers. The pipes to the taps and standpumps gaped to no purpose. The septic tanks grew stagnant beneath the houses. Once more, water was painstakingly gathered and stored in old calabashes and gourds. Old wells were re-used. One or two had been cemented round the sides, right down through the first impervious layer to the second, so that the water that drained into them was clear. But mostly the old wells had been unprotected and bad, the water standing high in them now, and showing whence it drained, soaking through the contaminated soil and the cesspits. It was easier to draw water from these old wells than to collect it from trickling streams and muddy pools. It was easier to wash body and clothes near the wells than to carry the water away. As they washed, the water drained back into the wells. Not much time passed, a mere matter of days, but germs thrive fast.

So the sickness came, so silently and suddenly that it was everywhere in their midst before they were aware of its coming. Malaria, yes, *that* had come in a wave with the heavy rains; but

now came a new, fierce wave of sickness, a fever that was not of the mosquito but of the bad water and the bad wells, water that drained through the soil and the cesspits. Typhoid swept through the village, swept in a dreadful, powerful silence that yet knocked loudly on the door of every house and of every hut, and soon the sound of mourning rose again, but this time it carried with it echoes of old, long-slumbering superstitious fear.

The first doctors arrived and they moved among the houses and the huts. The first ambulances bore away some of the victims. Alale's face was sombre as she said, 'The sickness has been upon us only for days, yet already the sickness-dancers are here. They have come up from the valley to help us, they say. Aku is very worried.' Paul walked with her to the gate whence they could see the road as it wound through the village, a road filled with figures, strangers dancing weirdly, dancing and drumming and singing. A priestess, adorned with white cloths, led the dancing. Along the sides of the road gathered clusters of villagers, some staring at the spectacle, others already clapping their hands to the monotonous, eerie music. A few stepped forward into the road and presently they danced too, drawn by the rhythm, drawn by fear of the sickness. They danced to appease and honour the sickness-god, so that he would remove his wrath from them. The sinking sun glinted through the trees and the clouds threatened, yet stayed their attack. Alale continued, 'Seth came to tell Aku that someone has dug a pool in front of the old oracle cave. That means initiation ceremonies tonight, and by tomorrow they will refuse to allow the doctors in their homes. They will not go to church or hospital. The sickness will overcome them.' Paul nodded, 'Their minds as well as their bodies'.

They watched for a long time and Paul was aware all the time of the old oracle cave in the forest below them. In the old days, before Nyitso existed, difficult judgments would be brought to the cave by near-by peoples, brought by processions beating gongs and drums, and blowing on the pipe-flutes. Then the people would sit down, facing away from the cave, and crying out in a great voice a greeting to the god within, 'O Maker of Paths, O Mover of Stones, O Feller of Trees, O Seer of Hidden Things'. Presently the Secret Priest within would give the

required judgment to the Public Priest without. The one judged guilty would be fined, one-third of the fine for the Chief's Treasury, one-third for the people's treasury, one-third for the god. The god's share would be poured out at the entrance of the cave.

Nyitso's first Christians had boasted that they had never attended the oracle cave in procession and that, under their neglect, the oracle ceased to speak, even to the people from the areas around who had been accustomed to come in great numbers.

Yet even today, the Nyitso people avoided the open space in front of the cave and nobody approached it at night carrying a light. For these prohibitions endure in the undergrowth of the brain, even though the main paths have been swept clean.

So Paul and Alale watched for a long time, and the drumming increased in power. The tempo did not quicken; the same monotonous beat persisted, eerie and mesmerizing. It drew more dancers into the road, the road grew crowded with them, villagers and strangers now intermingled, and at their head still danced the priestess in the white cloths. About her, male attendants pranced and leapt and sang. The day turned to darkness swiftly and completely. Aku and Seth came hurrying up the road; Aku's face was twisted with distress. He said, 'Paul, there is a pool now in front of the old oracle cave. Tomorrow the doctors are coming with the inoculations but there will be few to receive them. The other will refuse.' Paul stared at him. 'We must break up this dancing', he said, then 'Can we not make a counter-distraction—ring the bell as though calling them to assemble?' Aku cried, 'They would not even hear it under the noise'. Seth said grimly, 'They would hear if someone stopped the noise'. Paul cried out, 'That's it. Seth, can you collect some strong men who will not fear the sickness-god? Bring them here. Then, all together, we can move among them, take all the musical instruments away, call to them by their own names, send them home.' Aku said eagerly, 'Yes. We shall do that.' Seth said, 'Wait here for me', and he swung his way up the road. While they waited, the dancing crowd came nearer and presently moved by, twisting and reeling, to the unvarying rhythm of the gongs and the drums, while the pipe-flutes drew them forward,

to the forest and to the cave.

Presently Seth returned, bringing with him some dozen of the younger men. They were of Nyitso's new generation and they did not fear the gods of superstition. Nevertheless they preferred to move in a group on this venture and one or two threw backward glances into the darkness. Paul said, 'Aku, there might be danger. You are not young', and, as Aku protested, Seth had inspiration. He said suddenly, 'Give us half an hour, half an hour exactly. Then ring the bell; ring it well and strongly and when the people gather together on the church ground, announce about the inoculations as though nothing had happened.'

Aku might have protested again, but Seth was already walking away. He called back, 'We shall rely on you'.

The little band tramped throught the forest in the night's darkness to the cave. The noise ahead showed them the way more clearly than a light and presently they found the crowd seated all round the open space where the new pool gleamed in the starlight. The gongs and the drums beat steadily and the pipe-flutes sang weirdly above them. By the pool stood a priest and before him he rolled little heaps of kola nuts. Paul groaned in something like disgust. The cult was widespread, but only once before had he come in close contact with it, seeking news items in his journalist days. That was at its headquarters, near the capital. After a candidate had chewed a kola nut from the house of the Sickness-god, he was bathed in a pool before the priest. If anyone came in mockery, they believed, the pool would drown him. Thereafter, church and hospital were forbidden to him, and a doctor was to be avoided at all costs. In sickness or trouble, they should appeal to their own god, and if they had behaved well towards him, especially in the matter of sending gifts of yam and fowls, he would protect them.

Yet, in spite of disgust at this folly, he could not turn away. The villagers had to be released from the mesmerism, for behind them in the village raged the typhoid, a god too in its way, a merciless god.

Seth displayed all the latent ability of a raiding shock trooper. He allowed most of the half-hour to pass. Then he sent his men in twos and threes among the crowd. 'Grab all the gongs and

pipes and drums and anything else they may be playing', he said, 'and throw them in the bush. If you recognize anyone, call him by his name and tell him he is wanted in the village.' So they moved, swiftly and unexpectedly, among the seated crowds and as they seized the musical instruments from startled hands, and their sound died away, so it was replaced by confused questions and murmuring and stirring, dominated by their own voices, as they cried out, waveringly at first, but increasing in confidence, 'Cumah, go home'. 'Kwasi, your wife seeks you', 'Kwafu, your old father is calling'.

It was ridiculous in its way, but it worked. The sudden breaking of the mesmerizing rhythm, the sound of their own names, brought them to their feet, staring rather sheepishly at one another. Then, suddenly and majestically, the great bell tolled. Its voice hovered above the trees, curled down the stream, echoed in the cave, danced on the rocks, the bell that had called the last generation to prayer, and now recalled this one to its senses. In silence, here and there urged by the band of interrupters, they began drifting back to the village. Then Seth said to the cult-strangers, 'Go back to your valleys and leave us in peace. We of Nyitso have no need of you.' He was a powerful figure in the now torch-lit darkness, big and handsome and muscular, his cloth swaying arrogantly from his shoulders. He said again. 'Go now. Go in peace.' His words were of peace but his attitude and voice were those of a strong man who had no fear of them, or of their beliefs. They began to mutter and move about, and presently to move to the road. They went down into the darkness. Presently, again, they began to sing. But they were a good way away by then. Their voices died into the darkness.

Next morning the doctors came, and the orderlies, and the nurses, with all the necessary equipment for inoculating large numbers of people. They set up tables inside the three classrooms of the school, and as they made their preparations the crowd gathered near by and watched. Superstitious fear had been vanquished, but unfamiliarity brings its own fear. Their faces were like masks, their eyes watchful. Aku bustled about, happily secure in the knowledge of his own immunity. For his talk of forward-thinking was not unfounded. Every member of his family possessed a small yellow-backed international booklet,

recording details of inoculation, against typhoid, tetanus, cholera, yellow-fever, and smallpox. More could scarcely be asked of the most progressive of men. Paul felt secure too, and so did many others. But they were outnumbered by the rest, not only by those who had never been inoculated, but by those who had never even heard of it, so that it seemed to them that while these doctors laughed at the old magic, they merely brought in a new magic. They stared fixedly as the preparations were made. Amid the group moved two white men. They stared most fixedly at them. But though they stared, they did not move, not even when the doctor called to them, not even when Aku called to them, and him they knew well. They would not retreat. They stood and they stared fixedly. But no one would be the first to move forward. Paul sighed. In a group he discerned Ama and Togbe. He would take them himself to one of the tables. He moved out across the open space, and, as he moved, the spell was broken in an unexpected way. Cumah's wife saw him and suddenly dashed across the open space to intercept him, as she recognized him. She was always called Cumah's wife, and nobody bothered to ask her real name, because she was quite crazy, and what was the sense of asking a crazy woman her name. Once or twice Paul had helped her with a load of firewood and now she recognized him as a familiar face against the background of these medical strangers. She clasped her baby to her breast, for even crazy women have babies, and pelted across the square. She was wild-eyed with fear of the sickness. But perhaps Cumah's wife was not quite as crazy as everyone thought. She cried out to Paul, 'Will the medicine save my child? Will the medicine save my child?', and pointed across at the strangers. He answered her in a slow, clear voice, because that was the way everyone addressed her, and his voice carried to the watching, listening crowd. He said, 'Mother, I do not know if it will save your child. But this I know, *Without it we cannot save your child.*'

Cumah's wife ran across to the table. She threw her wrapping cloth down on the ground and thrust the child upon it, falling on her knees. She cried out, 'The medicine. For my child.' One of them picked up the child, and held it while another gave it the sharply painful injection so that an angry little wail burst out.

Cumah's wife examined her own punctured arm with deep interest. She took the child again and slowly, importantly, walked back to the crowd. A doctor called out, 'See. A woman has come, and a young child. Are there not men among you?' Some of the men began to move forward, sheepishly, still nervous, but as one after another suffered the inoculation without any apparent ill effects, their confidence grew, and presently the lines, men, women and children, moved briskly past the tables. They even jostled and joked and almost a holiday atmosphere now prevailed. Now and again someone fainted, but this caused no alarm now, only jests and jeering. Of those who fainted, Seth was one. He strode boldly to the table, flung back the robe from his bared arm, then suddenly rolled his eyes heavenwards while his body sank to the ground. A great gale of laughter shook the whole crowd.

But presently a new crowd-sound arose, a sound of anger. Some little way back from the road stood a small cluster of mean huts huddled closely together, and there the doctors on the previous day had found not only the worst cases of the whole village, but even a man who had died and still lay amid the sick. The huts had been indicated for disinfecting and three of the orderlies now set about this. But immediately there was outcry from the remaining occupiers. The sick were gone, they contended, and the dead one too. Their homes were stricken with sorrow, yet now came these strangers in their smart clothes, and carried outside their poor bedding and their utensils and opened their shutters and brought buckets of strong-smelling liquid to pour upon their floors. In their bewilderment, their sorrow turned to anger and they beat their hands against the invaders. Their cries brought others to the scene and more and more, and they all muttered darkly that the strangers should enter no one's home in this manner. They began to shout now, to shout abuse at the orderlies, to threaten them. They shouted loudly and fiercely.

The orderlies for the moment stood hesitating in the doorway of one of the huts whither they had withdrawn. It was a tense moment, when even murder could have happened. For the water, the sickness and the fear had stored up within all of them a frenzy of feeling which surged and seethed as it sought an

outlet. They had been tossed about by strange forces. They sought revenge. To conquer something, to destroy something, anything, to restore the balance in the scales. The orderlies stood in the huts, and now their faces in turn were like masks, their eyes watchful. The crowd shouted, abused, threatened.

Suddenly there fell a silence, a silence greater than the shouting had been. For among them had tottered an old man, who held the arm of an attendant for support, and his old eyes blazed as they passed over the crowd. It was the chief, Nana Osei Adea, come to attend for the inoculation, with the old queen-mother. Ignoring his speakers, he called now, himself, to certain ones by name with his own voice, and they came running, dropping down in a group to honour him. His voice was quiet, conversational. He addressed the group, ignoring the crowd. He said, 'Is there no rest house any more in the village, where these people may sleep?' In chorus they said eagerly, 'Oh yes, there is a rest house'. He asked again, 'Can you not come all together in the mornings and help to build new huts for these ones?' They all nodded. 'Yes, Yes. We can build new huts for them in the mornings.' 'Very well, then', he said. He gave no command, but the matter seemed to be settled. Then someone asked, 'What of these huts, which the strangers say are filled with the sickness?'

He turned his glance then, on the crowd, and in a terrible voice, he shouted out, 'Burn down these huts'. Again he shouted out in the voice of Adea who had held the hill of Nyitso against all comers, even the bands of Ashantis, and now held it against the sickness. 'Burn down these huts.' Then he moved away without ceremony, leaving behind him a silence.

Presently it was broken by the crackling of the flames and little black flecks floated from the burning thatch and wood, and drifted in the still air, while the smoke coiled upwards heavily, slowly.

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Next morning, while the sounds of the village lay hushed in the silence of the sickness, Aku came running across to Paul where he stood amid the tomato beds in the garden. Already the green fruits were hanging here and there on the drooping stalks, small but rounded and good. Soon the redness of ripeness would appear.

He said, 'Paul. Who do you think is in my house? Judge Wenya. He asks particularly to meet you. Will you come?'

The name brought a memory of all that lay outside Nyitso, of all that lay in the recent past. The judge seemed to represent the forces that had ruined him. For a moment he felt again the angry bitterness that had once filled him. But it was a pale shadow of its former self. The ruination, if it were that, did not seem important now. The forces were reduced to life size.

The judge was elderly, a little grizzled, a little wrinkled. But his eyes were shrewd and his handclasp was firm. He shook hands in the manner in which the British did, firmly but with no ceremony. Not surprising—he had worked under their administration the greater part of his life. He was attired in western style in a well-tailored dark suit, whereas Paul wore Aku's country shorts and a very loud American-Boy shirt which hung over the shorts. Both were aware of the contrast and neither was troubled by it.

Wenya said, 'You are the knowledgeable young man whose name I hear constantly these days'. To which Paul replied coldly, 'I am an ex-detainee, returned to my village to hide for a while. I believe you are a party member.' Wenya nodded, 'Ah yes. The Preventive Detention Act.' He mused a moment, then passed on to the second part of the sentence. 'I am, as you say, a party member. I have indeed an imposing card to that effect. Not that it is a talisman. When the time comes to arrest you, you will

still be arrested, in spite of a row of party cards. Hence, if all are equally in danger, then all, one might say, are also equally safe. You must not allow your experiences to make you fearful.'

Paul said, 'When the snake bites you it is not necessary to seek the bites of its children before you die'. Wenya's eyes twinkled. His personality affected Paul exactly as his daughter's had. He was attracted, yet rendered wary by awareness of the subtle strength that lay behind the twinkling eyes and below the grave voice. The voice continued. 'May I congratulate you on the interesting series of articles which I have been enjoying in my paper lately'. Paul was startled. He blurted out, 'How do you know which articles I write?' Wenya smiled, 'Because I know my village and my people. They are, in their way, unique. When they begin to move about a printed page I recognize them. I say to myself, "Someone has come into our midst who both knows us and loves us, in spite of our bad little ways. That someone is newly arrived. He has ability." So I cast my eyes about for someone who answers to all these descriptions, and they alight on you.' All this time the judge had been seated but Paul had remained standing, his attitude almost hostile. Now he sat down in a sudden movement. He said, 'I do not think you sought me to discuss my alleged talents'.

Wenya shook his head. He leaned forward. He said, 'We are backward here. You have seen for yourself. We have also suffered disaster. Something must now be done.'

Paul said bitterly, 'Why ask me? Ask your precious government. They talk so grandly of their achievements. In the plains they complain of neglect. Of that I have no certain knowledge. But of this village I have certain knowledge. What have they achieved here? We are unlettered, and fearful of the elements that mock our puny schemes, fearful of the strange sicknesses that the germs bring, invisible germs, so that to us it seems that sickness must be sent by evil spirits. We must eat, so we hoe the soil. The soil gives us food, yam and maize, the soil gives us money too, the rich, hot soil of the cocoa trees. The soil takes our health and our minds. Our minds are lost in the soil. And the money from the cocoa? The government takes its fat share of that. Cocoa makes the government rich. But what do they do for us?'

He stopped abruptly, breathless with vehemence, and Aku's heart swelled for he noticed that Paul no longer spoke of 'they' and 'them', but of 'we' and 'us'.

Wenya said, 'If we ask things of the government, or of anyone else, we must know what we want. For what shall we ask?'

Paul answered without thought. It was as though somewhere in his brain he had thought it all out in advance. He said, 'First we must break the pipes from the springs, then we must build up the banks. We must have back our river. Then we must fill in the old wells, all of them. Then we must have a reservoir, fed from the deep waters, fed by pumps. If we build a good reservoir, we can have water not only for ourselves, but for other villages, those down in the valleys. We could have the chance of starting small industries, so could they. With water comes cleanliness, lightening of toil, freedom from sickness. But when we build, we shall build ourselves. Oh yes, let them send the clever engineers, but the toil shall be ours for we have the gift of toil. This time they will pay us, yes, from the cocoa money. No rascally contractors. We have stones in the quarry, good sand in places on the hillside. For the cement we shall pay, but the profits shall be ours.'

He paused again, with a sensation of peace that he had known only once before, when Ama had walked up the road. It was as though at last the contrasts were no longer contrasts, but fused into one meaningful whole, the plains and the bus, the river and the bridge, the trees and the road. There was no conflict. They moved together naturally, easily. He went on. 'There are so many other things. Cash crops. Mostly it's just cocoa here. Cocoa's too easy. One main crop and sell it to the Marketing Board. No trouble.' Unconsciously he was quoting now the words of the trading woman, who had sat beside him in the bus, the day he left the prison. 'The crop fails or the price drops. Then the whole village sits with no money. They tell me pineapples used to thrive here, on the hillsides in terraces, on the fringe of the forest. But there is a superstition. When one desires the taste of pineapples, he is near to death. The superstition killed the pineapples. We must kill the superstition. The factories at the coast will buy our pineapples.'

As he talked the visions passed before his eyes. Visions passed

also before Aku's, different visions. A wonderful thought had come to him. The next chief. How often had he worried at the thought of Adea's going. Who would succeed him? How often had he cast his eyes from one to another of the eligible candidates, only to pass on, troubled. They must have a man like Adea, strong and understanding. More. In these times, he must be lettered, have knowledge of the things of the mind. Perhaps they would revert to old custom and elect a woman. Only the other day, a nineteen-year-old girl had been elected chief at Agona Nsabu. His eyes passed over the possible candidates among the women, but again he was troubled. But now Paul was here, sitting here in this very room, with his education and his training and his wonderful power over words. Yet Paul worked alongside the labourers in the sun, so that his sweat joined theirs as it sank into the soil. Aku shivered with secret exultation. He beamed broadly upon Paul. He beamed broadly upon Judge Wenya—now retired.

Wenya was rising to his feet now. He said to Paul, 'You plead well, my friend, a barrister in the court of life. Could you perhaps name one small industry that we could start.' But it was Aku who answered him. 'Tiles', he blurred out, 'Tiles for roofs. We have splendid clay patches. Nyakpo started it—that was where I bought *my* tiles. But Nyakpo died and after that nobody bothered.'

Wenya raised both hands before him and let them drop. He said, 'Oh, my people, my people. Nyakpo died, and after that nobody bothered.'

On the porch he paused. He said, 'I shall turn my eyes to all these matters. You have been most helpful. I am going to the capital. If I come back at great speed you will know that I have received the Hausa Farewell.'

His eyes twinkled again. 'If a snake bites, it is not necessary to fear worms.'

Then he was gone, leaving Aku wrapped in beams. He felt a great desire to do something for Paul, give him a gift, show him some favour, something in return for this secret joy. He said suddenly, 'Paul, I shall keep the bell, up there, in the church tower. You are quite right. We must be cautious about traditions. We must be cautious too about the ways we progress. On both

sides we must seek out the best.' He had another inspiration. It was Aku's morning for inspiration. He cried out, 'We shall create new traditions. Yes, Yes.'

By some alchemy. Paul's first suggestion was transmitted to the Village Council, and the Chief, and then back to the villagers. Again the chief's crier performed his halting perambulation and again new sounds filled the village. Down the hillside they worked, widening and deepening the old river bed, and building up the banks and beating them to hardness, till the wandering water began to drain back and to find its old path. Then they broke up and pulled away all the pieces, till again the spring waters ran in their old beds. Here to cut, there to fill. Every movement increased the flow of the old river, coming back into its own bed. Then they would fill their buckets from the river, but it was at least clean, living water.

So the disastrous fifth season drew to a close, the storms faltered, the scars on the hillside healed. The people from the huts that had been burned or been swept away in the water lived now in new huts, a number of huts placed tidily in a row, with big spaces between. They were still of mud bricks, but they were square, and larger than the others had been, and the openings for the shutters were much larger. There had been argument over all this in the Village Council, quite heated argument, but Aku had fought for the improvements, fought with a tenacity based on his new visions. For something else he fought too, for a Loan Fund, for roofing, so that a villager could borrow, at low interest, money for corrugated iron, for asbestos sheets, even for tiles. And if he could borrow he could also lend, at a little lower rate of interest. For that was where the roofing fund would come from, from the shillings and sixpences that could be spared from any household.

The immediate reaction among the villagers was one of suspicion. They knew the usurers, the money-lenders who came among them in bad times and lent them money against the cocoa crop, loans at 50 per cent interest. But curiosity conquered suspicion and presently one or two thoughtful ones came forward to lend, and one or two bold ones came forward to borrow. The others would follow, later, when the main cocoa crop was sold and money flowed more freely and the sight of it went to

their heads and filled them with daring and enterprise.

It was fitting perhaps that the season should end on a lighter note, with Children's Day. The official Children's Day was already past. Nyitso had lost it in the typhoid. This was doubly sad, for the children, because they had so few festivals in their lives. They worked in the fields, they worked in their homes, they played their part in the communal labour. They worked before school opened, they worked after it closed.

Now the idea spread around that though the official day had passed, Nyitso should have its own Children's Day in its place. There was no reason either why the adults should not join in too, a festival to mark the ending of the agony.

The excitement spread much faster than the sickness had. Oil palms were a suitable sacrifice. They felled the trees which thrust out long branches upward and outward from close to the ground, so that they looked like growing clusters of ostrich-feather plumes, green and glowing. A large cube was cut out of the trunk as it lay and a hollow stem from the Pipe Tree inserted to lead the sap into a waiting calabash. Then burning torches were applied to the sides of the cube and after a while withdrawn when the heated, rich sap would start to flow down the tube and a frothing liquid surged and sang in the calabash. Another day, another cut, another touch of fire, and the liquid crept higher in the calabash while around it buzzed the bees, who would not make their home in the forest but came to visit it now, drawn by the sweet, rich smell of the palm wine.

There were other preparations in plenty, cooking and baking and even killing of chickens for the feast. The small girls gathered seeds from the trees and made necklaces. The small boys gathered the hard-shelled fruits and made wheels of them, on which to build little carts which they trundled about purposefully. All of them gloated over hidden stores of fruit from the Snuff Box tree. When the fires are lighted for the feasting on the open ground, place the fruits on the fire. When they begin to bubble and fizz, snatch them from the flames and hurl them to the ground, squealing with joy at the resultant sharp explosion. Nyitso crackers.

They gathered branches of palm leaves for the children to wave in the procession that began the day, branches of candle-

wood tree to form torches for the procession that ended it, when the oozing gum would take a flame readily and hold it, even against the evening breeze.

Aku bustled about with joy. It was practically a harvest home after all.

Ama had preparations to make too. For days she went about with her hair parted into about thirty little squares. On each square, the hair was carefully drawn together and pulled as far as possible from the scalp. The gathered strands were then strongly oiled and bound, round and round, with a strong thread, till a little shaft of bound hair stuck out abruptly from her head. Square after square, till Ama looked like a golliwog. But she didn't mind this in the least. It was all part of the treatment which would turn her hair from a little mat of woolly curls into a mass of long, strong hair, ready to be swept up into a style as fine as any to be seen in the valley, where she had learned this fascinating new fashion.

Paul's enjoyment of the festival—everybody called it that by now and Children's Day had merged into the general picture—was marred by a feeling of slight unease. On the day before, he and Seth had patronized the once-more flourishing restaurant and as they sat on a shaded bench, Zo-piapia came running up. He said, 'It is he—it is Agyeman, that very same contractor. What is he doing here?' A long, beautiful, black Mercedes-Benz drew up in the road and a man stepped out. He surveyed the restaurant with some interest, but presently walked away, down the road, out of sight. Zo-piapia dashed off and after an interval returned with a little group who muttered angrily at the sight of the car. They were puzzled by the man's behaviour, they reported. He had gone strolling off along the hillside where there was nothing, just the remains of the old dam. What was he doing in Nyitso? Was he seeking to exploit them here, even in their own village? Paul grew thoughtful. A man of Agyeman's known rapacity had always a scheme in mind. He would not visit the village merely for an afternoon's drive, to flaunt a shining automobile before simple villagers. He must have scented out the possibilities of development. He brought with him the odour of fear. True, the village was backward, there was toil, dirt, and disease. But what might come in their place,

alienation of farmland, wage-slavery, commercial paganism? In momentary fear, he could wish to raise great gates before Nyitso, to shut the world out again, even more effectively than it had been before he arrived. Surely there was greater peace, greater safety in the known ways. That was talking as Aku sometimes did, in his 'traditional' moods. Yet it was Aku who said, 'I am no supporter of the argument that because anything presents dangers, that it must therefore not be undertaken'. Aku was right. The village could not stand still. It must move forward. Yet the dangers might be lessened if it moved slowly and kept its own hands on the controls. Aloud he said to Seth, 'How can we get rid of this man?'

Seth was ever a lover of action. He gathered a group about him. When the man returned there was a little group clustered about the car, an industrious group. Diligently they were patting the shining body, their hands white with maize flour, and yellow with palm oil. The car looked dreadful. A little crowd of onlookers gathered near by. The man called out angrily, 'What are you doing to my car?' They all stopped and gazed at him, wide-eyed. One of them whispered, 'We are bringing gifts to the ju-ju'. The whole crowd caught the word. 'The ju-ju', they echoed, nodding wisely.

'What the blazes are you talking about?' shouted Agyeman angrily, his eyes on the plastered car. 'There is a ju-ju in this car', said Seth solemnly. 'It does not wish you to enter this village. We have brought gifts, so that you can go safely, but if you return you will surely die.' 'You will surely die', they chanted in chorus. The crowd, which had grown considerably larger, was not to be left out. 'You will surely die', they intoned. An old woman was so impressed with the apparent solemnity of the occasion that she began to dance in front of the car, swaying grotesquely and clapping her hands in rhythm. The crowd had caught the contagion. A man's voice suddenly sang the long, rolling phrases of an old cult song.

For a moment Agyeman stood undecided. Yet here was a crowd of people obviously in the mood of superstition. He knew how quickly such a mood could change from mesmerized chanting to violent action. It only needed someone to call out 'Tear the car to pieces', and it could happen. Below this fear too,

there lurked another, fear of the spirits, a fear that people like Agyeman never lose. In emerging nations, there are plenty of opportunities for the unscrupulous to climb to power and affluence, to climb on the backs of their fellows. Yet they do not know ease, because power and affluence are new to them, the climb has been too easy. Safeguards are needed. So they pour libation to the spirits, they placate the forces of envy and revenge, they pour libation. Underneath all the trappings of civilization, Agyeman was still a primitive, and Seth had read him correctly.

Now he said angrily, 'Get away from my car', and climbed in as they all moved obediently away.

The engine started, the car moved off, but only for a few yards. There was no mistaking that swaying sensation. One tyre was dreadfully flat. He climbed out again. The little group trotted forward eagerly. The crowd pressed on their heels. They were all anxious to help. It was some little time before it was clearly established that there was no puncture. They willingly pumped up the tyre to a state of pleasing resistance.

Agyeman climbed back into the car.

The engine started, the car moved off, but only for a few yards. There was no mistaking that swaying sensation. Another tyre was dreadfully flat. He climbed out again. The little group moved forward again, but doubtfully now. The crowd pressed forward but their faces were grave. It was some little time before it was clearly established that there was no puncture. The old woman who had danced wailed out, 'The ju-ju. He will bring disaster to us. Let him die.' They all hushed her and willingly pumped up the tyre to a state of pleasing resistance.

In spite of the heat of the afternoon, Agyeman felt cold. Fear of the crowd was absorbed in a greater fear, fear of the spirits. In his pagan soul he knew the power of the spirits, power against which a Mercedes-Benz, whether shining and beautiful, or smeared with palm oil was no protection at all. For a long time he paused before he plucked up his courage and turned the ignition key.

The engine started, the car moved off, but only for a few yards. There was no mistaking that swaying sensation. Another tyre was dreadfully flat. He stopped the car and beads of sweat stood

out on his forehead. But now the crowd did not press forward. They waited. 'It is the ju-ju.' They began to shout and dance. Someone shouted, 'Let him die'. The whole group shouted, 'Let him die'.

Suddenly the car moved off, flat tyre and all. The acceleration was startling. The bumping car disappeared down the sloping road, and a great jeering shout of laughter followed it.

Hence Paul's unease at the festival and afterwards. But presently it was dissipated by the return of Judge Wenya. The Volkswagen slid to a halt alongside Paul in the roadway one morning. He leaned out of the window and said, 'We shall have the reservoir. The allocation of local treasury for water will be used to repay the loan, also the allocation from at least three of the valley villages who wish to enjoy the water. So the cocoa will give us the water after all. To repay the rest, we shall have to work hard; we shall have to establish some small industry. For all these things, I have given assurances, only assurances and much talk. Yet I have a loan, a bank loan, imagine.'

Paul was unsmiling. He said, 'That is why the contractor Agyeman was on the prowl up here'.

Wenya frowned. 'Yes?' he said. 'I expected trouble with him. I had to work through government channels. I have some influence, but he has more. He has practically a monopoly in these matters. Yet he made no trouble. He said he was not interested, even made some slighting remarks about tenth-rate villages.'

Paul smiled then. He said, 'Sometime I may be able to offer you some enlightenment. But who will build, then?'

'We shall', said Judge Wenya calmly. 'Oh yes, they will send the clever engineers to make the drawings, but we shall give our toil. We shall control the supplies. We shall have the profits.' He unwrapped a flat parcel and revealed a neat, metal plate which bore the words, 'Nyitso Development Co. Ltd.' 'As one of the shareholders', he said, 'I thought I might just as well make a start.'

PART 4



The Time of Hope

∞ II ∞

It was a time of peace, of peace after torment. The rains had gone again, leaving for a while the morning mists. They drifted down the valleys, gossamer-fine and the colour of pearls, so that sometimes it seemed that the whole world was filled with mist, and Nyitso alone rose above it, solitary in a high place that rode above the clouds. The nights were clear, with a golden moon rising from the plains and changing slowly to silver as it swept through the night sky.

It was the time of the birds. They appeared everywhere at once, on the roof tops, in the trees, even on the pathways, so that a sudden step would send clouds of them rising swiftly in scalding flight. They greeted the dawn, murmured in the noon-day heat, and took full-throated farewell of the sinking sun. It was puzzling from where they had suddenly appeared. Perhaps they had been there all the time, inconspicuous and silent as they sheltered from the rains. Now they were released from silence and the need for shelter and they called their joy aloud. They flaunted brilliant colours against the background of sky and forest. Flashes of bright yellow as the weavers rose in chattering flocks to perches in palm trees, flashes of gleaming purple as the glossy starlings whirred their way from tree to tree. A wonderful glimpse of scarlet breast as a shy shrike perched for a moment on a low branch, a line of dazzling blue as a solitary kingfisher swept by in a swift short flight.

Most beautiful of all were the tiny sunbirds. Perpetually active, they flitted from tree to shrub, shrub to tree, hovering before the flowers, sipping nectar with long, curved beaks. The plumage was iridescent, metallic, colour after colour shot through with yet more colour, bright green, purple and scarlet, glossy black and a beautiful shade that held in it the glory of burnished copper.

At dawn the bulbul filled the shrubs with liquid melody, the orioles answered him from the tree tops. In the drowsy heat of noon the soft murmur of the wood doves soothed to somnolence. At sunset came the great flocks of bee-eaters, a wave of twittering song as they passed in graceful, gliding flight. Even the night had its voices, the long strange conversations of the night-jars, the taunting interruptions of the owls.

There were strangers too, those who left the wintry places of Europe for a share of glorious sunshine. Flycatchers and wheat-ears frisked and flirted, tumbled in acrobatic antics. Scorning such tricks came the swallows in long, swooping flight.

It was a time of peace, but also a time of planning and action, above all of optimism. It was the beginning of a new year. Not the new year as shown on the calendars that hung on every third wall and behind every second door, so that even the hopelessly illiterate could point smilingly to a required date. The calendar showed late October. How drab were such printed dates against the living calendar that slowly unfolded all about them. There were thirteen months in the year, thirteen moon-months; there were five seasons and this was the first of the five, the warm dry time after the second rains. They could look ahead, if you wished them to, and fix a point in time. They could look ahead for five years. Beyond that they grew hesitant, then they laughed. To look ahead perhaps a year is wisdom, to look beyond five is folly. They could look back farther, perhaps ten years. After that they grew confused, then they laughed. To look back, beyond ten years, is ridiculous.

The second maize crop was reaped and the fields again stood empty. Again the stubble was burned, and the smoke rose in wisps in the air. The soil was soft from the rains. They dug the soil and turned it and dug in the ashes from the burning. The drainage ditches were cleaned and deepened. Presently they would plant again, the yams and cassava and the first maize crop.

But first came the rule of the cocoa, the small brown bean that could be planted to grow into strange shapes, schools and roads and hospitals. In the shelter of the forests the cocoa trees grew gently and delicately to maturity, the young plants sheltered by nursing plants which braved the hot rays of the sun to protect the cocoa; the broad flat leaves of the coco-yam,

the outstretched branches of the palms, then the clustered leaves of the odum, layer after layer of shade for the nursling, as it grew to maturity and even then it retained its place of privilege; the glossy green leaves, the reddish tints of the new growth, the heavy yellow fruits, the colours of decay, yet here the colours of growth, glowing in the perpetual gloom of living caverns. The tree gave up the yellow pods and the pods gave up the brown beans. Along the paths and the road walked the cocoa-farmers, men, women, and children. They bore baskets on their heads, baskets filled with brown beans. They made tables for them in the sun, woven tables on legs of stout branches. The heaps of beans lay in fermentation. The first purchases of the main crop were already in the talking stage. Board representatives occupied the little office next to the police station and strolled among the houses and the long tables, looking staringly at the beans, sometimes taking up one or two in their hands, while the owners watched anxiously.

Within the small brown beans lay their hopes and their fears for the year ahead. Over them, as always, hovered the shadow of the blight that could strike down whole rows of trees, strike down whole years of hopes and plans.

Strangely, after the poor mid-crop, the main crop was good. Presently the buying commenced and a new little stream began flowing through the village, a stream of money that could caress or destroy just as any water stream might do. It was a time of optimism, of new clothes, of new roofs, of new pots and pans, and earrings from the goldsmiths. The goldsmiths had gone away to labour in the plains; now they returned for the season of money, and sat on their verandahs, fashioning the gold into new shapes, ornate pins, bold pendants, and long earrings. Rings too, for fingers that had plucked the cocoa pods, and bracelets for supple wrists, bracelets that gleamed in the sunlight as the wrists shook out the lengths of rainbow-coloured cloth.

The goldsmiths were hard at work on their verandahs, and so were others. Some fashioned new calabashes and gourds from the trees and polished them mightily with sandpaper leaves from the tree called Nyitso fig. Others took leaves from the screw pine to weave new floor mats. Others again, especially the

poorer ones, crushed dried pods of locust bean and pummelled and pounded them with a variety of other ingredients till a suitable house-plaster emerged to render the outer walls proof against the next rains.

As the tempo of life in Nyitso increased, so did that of Paul's own life. There were new writing commissions, and the inexpert teaching of Togbe who brought to his lessons great eagerness, and confusion as great. There was now a seat on the Village Council and a variety of unexpected tasks arising therefrom; there were the recurring problems of the little restaurant where Afua had put up a new notice over the serving counter. It announced bluntly, 'No Trust'. Above all, there were the initial problems of the newly formed Development Company. So Paul was busy, so busy that one afternoon he deliberately gave himself a holiday and sat once more on the verandah wall in Aku's courtyard. It was a scene of peace and perhaps if any portion of time must be selected to record the peak of Paul's happiness in Nyitso, this would be a suitable time to select. For happiness may be said to consist of sorrows passed and dangers met, while life still grows and renews itself, like an undying plant; for happiness has seasons too and it reflects the strange paradox of the earth seasons, where midsummer reaches its peak on the longest day, so that the very next day is shorter, so that winter, so to speak, starts in the very heart of summer.

It was a scene of peace, but also of activity. Aku was engaged in preparing home-made coir, and this he did by means of a sharp iron spike driven into the ground. Upon this he forced a cocoanut, so that the spike parted the fibres and removed the husk from the shell. On one side of him lay quite a pile of fibres, on the other a still larger pile of cocoanuts.

Alale and Afiba were making clay pots. Constantly dipping their hands in water they smoothed and moulded the malleable clay till presently the top half of a large, rounded pot with wide mouth lay shining on the circle marked carefully on the ground. So, from one to another of the three pots, they passed, dampening, moulding, smoothing. Presently they would repeat the process with the bottom halves and then each pair of halves would be fitted carefully together and the joining line

smoothed and patted and smoothed, till it vanished out of existence altogether. Later, they would be baked hard and perhaps painted with bizarre designs.

Afiba was skilful, but not quite as skilful as Alale, perhaps because she was a little scornful. At school, she informed them, they had a potter's wheel and on it one could make the most splendid clay pots in half the time, and with more intricate shapes. Making them by hand was 'coasty'. This was a new word. It sprang from the old colonial days when this part of the world was often referred to simply as 'The Coast'. Hence the word expressed anything that was out of date, or—to youthful eyes at least—in need of reform. So handmade utensils were *coasty* and stand-pumps were *coasty* and in the towns quite a few parents were noticing that good manners were also being relegated to a state of coastiness. But not in Aku's household. Alale's serenity and Aku's essential charity combined to generate an atmosphere of kindness to which no one, not even the adolescent, could remain insensitive. Alale now said lazily, 'A potter's wheel, eh? Now, that would be a nice change.'

The afternoon turned slowly to evening and Paul thought his own thoughts till Aku suddenly said, 'Paul, I have been reading your column too. I did not realize it was yours till Judge Wenya mentioned it. Sometimes I am very stupid.'

Paul said, 'Not much use having a nom-de-plume if everyone knows who it is'.

'No. Not everyone', answered Aku. 'Just those with eyes to see.' He worked on for a while and repeated, 'Eyes to see. I was thinking of what you wrote about that newspaper competition for naming ten prominent people who had served their country well, and deserved well of it. You said you could easily give such a list but that the people were not prominent at all. And at the top you put an old woman who worked hard all her life for her family and her village and asked for nothing in return but her simple needs. Somehow, I could just *see* that old woman, trudging up the road from the farmlands all her life, day after day, her feet moving through the dust of the dries and the mud of the rains, her face lined with wrinkles. So ignorant. So courtly with her greetings and her smile. "For God gives many gifts, but to her only one, the gift of a smile".'

He paused and blinked his eyes rapidly, repeating softly, 'To see. To see.' Then he said, 'Where do you get these ideas, Paul? Why do they not come to others of us, to me? You are different. Is this progress? Always I am talking of tradition and of progress. And now I am wondering if I know what I am talking about. Yes, you are different.'

Alale and Afiba were in the kitchen now. The two men were alone in the courtyard. Aku gathered up his pile of coir and carried it on to the verandah. Paul had not answered him yet, he did not seem to notice. He sat on the wall too. He said musingly, 'Somewhere I have read that nations perpetually throw up four main types, the warrior, the farmer, the law-maker, and the priest. I think you must be the priest-type, Paul.'

Paul laughed suddenly. He said, 'Aku, you are riding with the moon. Come back down.'

Aku shook his head firmly. 'You are different. Look at Seth. He is not much younger than you, you are so to speak of the same generation.' He veered off slightly. 'Kofi has gone to the farmlands with Seth. That is good because Seth is a good farmer. He has the hands that make things grow. He does not despise labour. Kofi can learn much from him and that is good too, because at boarding-school Kofi does not have enough to do, in the way of work I mean. He sits all day in the classroom, and the only muscles he uses are those needed to keep the ears well rounded, so that the knowledge can pour in. In Nyitso the children work hard, all of them, from morning to night. Those who attend school are lucky. School is a holiday. So we create a gulf between our children, between those who are brought up on the old lines, and those that are brought up on the new.'

Aku was in a musing and talkative mood. He returned to the subject of Seth. 'Times are changing. One doesn't quite know what to hang on to. When Seth was still at school he was perpetually in trouble. Girl mad. Next thing a girl is pregnant. Her parents were furious. So was Seth's father because he had to pay a "knocking-fee" which is still customary in the area where the capital is. I think he paid twenty guineas. And after all that, the child died.'

He passed from this fact to the next without change of tone.

There was little point in growing angry or sorrowful in retrospect. 'Next thing Seth had another girl-friend who let him down in some way. So he telephoned her from a public telephone—this was still in the capital you understand—and they had a quarrel and he banged down the receiver. Unfortunately he banged too hard and damaged the telephone. He was fined ten guineas by the magistrate. So Seth's father had again to pay the money. This time he was so furious he said Seth could come home and use up his energies on the farmlands. We had peace for quite a while then. But it couldn't last for ever. He met a girl working on her family lands. With the same result. This time we couldn't have a second scandal right on our doorstep. So a marriage was arranged. Not very satisfactory. The girl is from an illiterate family. Still, she is a Christian, and she belongs here, and she seems to keep Seth in order. She has a tongue like a viper.'

Paul nodded absently. Seth's wife was a thin little thing, with a habit of looking at one sideways out of the corner of her eyes, a cold scrutinizing look.

Aku sighed. 'I suppose one of these days he'll break out again. That's what I mean by times changing. Seth is lucky. In the old days, the very old days that is, they would have beaten the Nyiko drums for Seth.'

Paul was suddenly very much interested. He said, 'Aku. In my early childhood I heard that expression often. I never thought to ask its meaning. Nowadays I don't even hear the expression. What does it mean?' He was prompted by more than curiosity. He found real pleasure in listening to Aku's reminiscences and tale-spinning. Nebulous portions of the Nyitso background seemed to take shape, to receive colour.

The moon was high in the heavens, streaming down into the courtyard. Aku's voice was mesmerizing in its effect. He said, 'Loose living and adultery and such were punishable by death, yet the death-sentence should be carried out by someone having no personal interest in the matter, or knowledge of the guilty one. Thus, there was no vindictiveness, only a cleansing of the tribe. So the elders of the young man would pass judgment, then proceed to the elders of a certain town to advise them of the execution. Then the young man would be dispatched to that

town, with a message which would identify him to the elders as the victim. That night on some pretext they would set off into the bush and at a suitable moment the man would be killed and his body buried in a shallow grave, so that the hyenas could dig it up if they wished. The elders returned to the town. The Nyiko drums were those that beat all the time they were away to warn everyone to keep indoors, for no one should have knowledge of the identity of the victim or of the executioners. In fact, the elders were permitted to kill anyone whom they found spying on these matters.'

It seemed cold in the courtyard in the silvery light. Paul's mind was following the story, visualizing the long silent walk along the deserted paths, the flickering light of the tiny lamp, the muffled beat of the drums. But Seth's face. It suddenly blurred and became another, the face of that elegant, vicious, London lawyer. He rose suddenly from the wall and said, 'I am growing like you Aku. I use the word "progress", and I wonder what it means.'

Aku squinted up at him. He said, 'Paul, why have you never married?' Paul laughed. 'That was something I was always going to do', he said. 'I still am, one day. I exist perpetually, so to speak, in the neighbourhood of marriage.'

There were not many such interludes, for Paul was indeed busy. When an *ad hoc* construction company commences work under the guidance of an ex-judge and an ex-journalist, with some part-time assistance from a village school headmaster, and plenty of advice from a well-meaning and well-varied group of village councillors, practically anything can happen. They wrestled valiantly with details of ordering and recording, with wage sheets, and lists of trust suppliers. The increasing demands could have been quite correctly gauged by observing the concurrent changes in Judge Weny'a's attire. At first he appeared at the little site-office in an elegant summer-weight suit. The jacket vanished first, followed by the collar and tie. Then the trousers shrank up into country shorts. Presently the shirt gave way to a country tunic and the metamorphosis was complete.

On the more active side their troubles were eased by securing the services of a man from the valley. He was a foreman of some experience, and the work was set in hand, rather shaky as to

consistency of progress, but bearing quite a noticeable resemblance to the involved drawings sent up from the capital by the clever engineers, and which caused many heated conferences and bewildered frowns. But all this initial bewilderment was temporary, because Judge Wenya had a brilliant inspiration. On his return from his second visit to the capital he came walking into Paul's house in a manner not unlike that of Aku. He said, gleefully, 'I've secured an engineer. He is young and he claims modestly that he is not well experienced, but of course next to us he will seem positively burdened with wisdom. He arrives next week. He is a West German.'

Paul's first reaction was one of dismay. He said, 'An engineer! On our little reservoir! How can we pay him a salary?' Judge Wenya beamed, as though he had spent the morning giving excellent judgment. He said, 'You know, this part of the world at the moment is absolutely cluttered up with earnest do-gooders. So I thought to myself, "Can I not find one of these excellent people to give us some assistance?" Broadly speaking, Europeans seem to be divided into two types, the exploiters and the idealists. We have had our fair share of the first, why not grab our share of the second. So I made diligent inquiry. This young man asks for food and lodging and a nominal salary. He arrives next week. I shall see Nana Adea and arrange for a rest-house and I think a steward too.'

Whatever misgivings Paul might have had were dissolved when Herr Günter Stüwe arrived and took brisk, forceful, and immediate control of the entire project. The village was agog with excitement. Never before had a white man actually *lived* in the village. In the colonial days, British D.C.s had lived in gloomy splendour in the valley, occasionally paying a ceremonial visit to the village, flanked by colourful arrays of the escort police. The last white missionary-clergyman to officiate in the church had lived in the plain with several churches in his care, and he had attended to each in toiling rotation. Occasionally, white government officers passed through and remained for a few nights. But this was to be practically a permanent fixture. On the day he arrived, chugging up the hillside in a little patrol car supplied by the firm who had sponsored his services, practically the entire village was massed on either side of the road.

To welcome a stranger in their midst was one of their strongest and, had they known it, noblest traditions. They waved and smiled and called out, 'Greetings, Stranger. Welcome, Stranger. Welcome, White man.' If Herr Günter Stüwe was at all surprised he did not show it. He stepped out of the car with phlegmatic calm, shook hands with the nearest twenty people, and followed the waiting steward majestically into the rest-house. That night he interviewed the leading lights of the village, next morning he surveyed the site, the drawings, and the assembled labourers, and suddenly the whole project moved as if galvanized by a gigantic kick in the pants.

Herr Stüwe was not only an idealist; he was a young man of almost dreadful orderliness. He ate twice a day, at six in the morning, at four in the afternoon. He ate enormously. The village thrilled with the news of his voracity. In between these hours he worked, ceaselessly and relentlessly, his shirt-sleeves rolled up as high as possible, the legs of his white shorts also rolled as high as possible. His long legs ended in brown sandals and his cropped flaxen hair vanished under a wide-brimmed, high-crowned straw hat. His English was precise and formal. So that Aku several times remarked excitedly to Paul. 'You see, everything has its compensations. The old imperialist days gave us at least the English language, a common tongue, so that we of the eastern regions can meet with those of the western, the southern, and even with the desert people of the northern stretches, and we can understand each other. By this means even this foreign European can converse with us.' Not that the young engineer confined himself to English. On occasion, some stupidity on the part of the labourers would rouse him to heights of vituperative German, so that the old people who remembered the old days of German Togoland would smile reminiscently and recall how Herr So-and-So had been wont to use that very self-same expression. One or two of them even went out of their way to address him as Herr Doktor, to show their familiarity with the formal courtesies of those bygone days. On other occasions, when exasperation went even beyond the vituperative stage, Herr Stüwe would clasp his hands to his brow and murmur, 'Litt-tle chieldren. Litt-tle chieldren', with a dying wail in his voice. But whatever his reaction, the labour

force on the new reservoir gave him their enthusiastic loyalty. With the uncanny unerring instinct of the rural African, they knew that here was a man who 'have sense'. Whatever the faults of the village might be, carping envy was not one of them. To efficiency and to superior knowledge they gave their whole-hearted admiration, speaking with smiling composure of their own shortcomings. At first their complaisance irritated Paul; it roused in him something of the old antagonism to white rule, so very recently withdrawn. But presently, like the rest of the village, he grew accustomed to the presence of the young white foreigner.

Not that Herr Stüwe was allowed to sink into complete anonymity. The small rest-house was pointed out to a variety of passers-by with the information that therein dwelt a man from West Berlin. All of them knew about Berlin, although some would have found it difficult to explain just where it was. It was the city with the wall, a great wall which stretched across it, a wall so great that one-half of the outside world was massed behind one side of it, the other half behind the other side. One day someone would climb that wall and then trouble would start. There would be a war, and soldiers would go, yes, even from Nyitso. They would to to Takoradi, to the big ships, and sail away and some of them would never return, swallowed up by the war in the outside world. Moreover, there were people who lived in that city, next to the wall, and to have one of these very people right here in the village, was a stupendous thought.

Then there was his name. The first time his mail arrived it was passed from hand to hand by the little crowd outside the mail office till a frantic postal agent rescued it. Each time the letter 'u' appeared it was embellished with two little dots.

This was fascinating. The village broke out into a rash of little dots. Even Afua's notice now said, 'No Trüst'. In return the village endowed Herr Stüwe with some knowledge of their own local tongue, and if his literal translations back into English resulted in expressions such as 'Standing at the mouth of death', and 'Silly creature of small stature', it was all in the interests of picturesque speech.

On the whole, the picture was at its brightest. The building of the reservoir was commencing under efficient supervision, the

road was standing up well and the finding of good gravel pits in the hills enabled quick repairs to be carried out when needed.

The company rejoiced now in the possession of a yard where stood mounds of stone and sand brought laboriously from places on the hillside. There were bags of cement too, but these came by lorry all the way from the other side of the great Volta River. A neat little Rosa Cometa Vibrobloc machine stood on a concrete platform under a canopy of palm-leaves. Various ingredients were poured into it, it clanked, shook, clanked again, and out came a large neat, cement block. Over the machine presided a rather grotesque young figure. It was Afua's afflicted son, Komla, who, in spite of the earlier diagnosing and halting of his actual disease, was known far and wide as Komla the Leper. He made the blocks efficiently. Herr Stüwe saw to that. He made them happily too, because the face of a leper might be noticeable in the grounds of a restaurant, but it is practically unregarded behind a block-making machine. People are too busy worrying about your blocks to pay much attention to your face. The blocks were intended primarily for the promised petrol station. The Committee of the Women's Council, everyone called it simply Madam Rosalie's Committee, was engaged in correspondence with an oil company about this. There was even talk of a bus breakdown service. Later it was hoped to interest the more prosperous within a wide range in building houses of blocks in place of mud bricks.

There was another little machine in the yard. This was for tile-making and already the first row of experimental tiles lay blinking back redly at the yellow sun. Here there was clay in evidence, good clay from thick patches not far away. Presently the village would use tiles in place of the imported sheets of corrugated iron. They would be cheaper and better. They all knew that.

The restaurant was thriving, especially after the arrival of strange labour needed for all these projects. Afua now had a second helper, who established an outpost of the catering empire at the building site where a stall was erected and food brought from the main centre to be sold to the men during their eating breaks. Beaten yam and boiled maize, and sometimes rice, even meat for two or three days following pay day. Sometimes the

meat came from the small, burrowing fat-mouse, or even the smaller dormouse. Porcupine was high on the list of favourites, but nothing could lead to quite such a long queue of food-buyers as the announcement that the succulent meat of the cutting-grass would figure on the menu. On such days the serving women had to be adamant in their cry of 'No Trust'.

The sounds of the village were new sounds now. Besides the two little machines in the yard was a heavier-toned concrete mixer on the building site. The motor clattered and the gaping mixing basin rattled with energy as it absorbed and transformed the swish of water, the clattering of the stone, the dull sliding sound of cement. Then out would fall the mixed concrete with a muffled roar and the scrape of spades would be heard as it was turned over and lifted into the waiting headpans, a rhythmic swing of the headpan into the air, to the waiting head and the concrete-carriers moved off in a slow, chanting line to the newly-dug foundations where a man stood waiting. Another rhythmic swing of the pan and the concrete poured heavily down into the waiting trenches. The reservoir was well and truly begun.

Above, in the tall trees, sat a troop of astonished black monkeys, gazing down at the unusual activity below from the safety of high perches. Their long, white tails twitched. Then suddenly, the deep call of the leader, and the troop was gone, leaping from branch to branch and tree to tree, to somewhere where such strange happenings had not yet penetrated.

The concrete-carriers were all women. For the work they discarded their flowing robes and wore short cotton dresses and on their heads were high headdresses, the cloth wound round and round to form a stable perch for the headpans. As they walked they chanted, and the men on the foundations chanted back. The voices rose up in the air, above the noise of the mixer and drifted away into the forest to where the sheltered cocoa trees listened motionless in their warm caverns of shade. It was right that they should hear that song, for from their fruits was growing a small white reservoir into which would be pumped the clean deep water of the dark earth, to flow through the village and take away with it dirt and decay and disease.

Nyitso was riding the crest of the wave. No one was more

fearfully joyful than Aku. Two or three times he said, 'But it was all here before. We have not brought in much, some money, one foreigner. Nearly everything else was here before. Why didn't we get together and do all this before?' Till Alale, cryptic as usual on these occasions, replied, 'A bald man cannot seek medicine from a vulture'.

Perhaps it was the mention of the word 'vulture' that reawakened Paul's slumbering misgivings. He suddenly became vividly aware of them, the great hunched-up birds sitting motionless on house-tops or flapping heavily about the road. There were not many to be seen in Nyitso, but those that were were respected. They were valuable scavengers. Nobody troubled them and they troubled nobody. They stared at passers-by with fixed gaze, unmoving, unless they judged an approach as being a little too close when they would move away, one or two unhurried clumsy movements. But there was something obscene about that naked head rising from the heavily feathered body, something coldly menacing about the fixed, impassive stare. They did not attack you, they merely watched you die. Then they picked clean your bones till there was nothing left on them. And all that remained of your joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, was a drying bone that vultures tossed away. That was nature, life, mankind, above all mankind.

He tried to shrug himself out of moods like this, but they inevitably returned. He was an ex-detainee, still politically suspect. One wrong step and the trap would snap down. All this work in the village; it was good work, badly needed, yet independent capitalistic projects were even more suspect than free-speaking journalists. The area itself was suspect. It was like Berlin where people were split in two by a wall. Here they were split in two by an invisible wall, the border that cut them off from their blood-brothers in Togoland. One day, someone would climb that wall and the trouble would start. Old German Togoland had been split in two after the Great War, with the western half being mandated to Britain, the eastern to France. Now the French half was independent, the Republic of Togoland under President Olympio; and the British half had been incorporated into the old Gold Coast, now the new state. Where did true patriotism belong, to the new state, or to the old blood?

Other matters too. In the capital they talked loudly of Marxian Socialism. What did these peasants need to learn of socialism? They knew one rule. If a man entered your land and removed crops to sell them, he was a thief and must be punished. But if he entered your land and ate his fill, then no one should hinder him. For the crops were there to appease the hunger of all. And this rule extended far beyond the farmlands. Wherever one of a group had food, the whole group ate the food. If you sat eating at the roadside and an empty-handed stranger passed, you offered him a share of your food. In the capital they talked of socialism and fought and scratched for ornate automobiles. In Nyitso they knew little of socialism or of automobiles, but the food was for all—the very young and the very old must have their share, the blind and the crazy must have their share.

Nyitso did not need talk of socialism. It needed a reservoir.

So the thoughts went on and on, churning around, and one day into the midst of them stepped a large, good-natured vulture, Reuben Agyiri. Paul was at his door as the car came nosing cautiously up the hill, as a car does on an unknown route. Then Paul saw Reuben and Reuben saw Paul. The car jerked abruptly to a halt and Reuben edged out. It was a small car, but resplendent in canary yellow with a row of bright green stars painted along each side. Reuben was a large man and he was even more resplendent. His trousers were a shiny silky black, the tuxedo-like jacket and tie were cream and the shirt a vivid scarlet. On the back of his head sat a panama hat. It was on the back of his head so that he could the more conveniently mop a large expanse of perspiring forehead with a huge red handkerchief. He trundled across the road, calling out, 'Hullo, Paul man. Glad to find you. At last. What a trip. What a trip. At last.' He clasped Paul's hand and threw an arm across his shoulders and trundled him into the front room, carefully closing the door behind him. That done, he stood for a moment, scrutinizing the room, his eyes moving from side to side in great sweeps, like the beam of a lighthouse. Paul grinned. The sight of Reuben made him feel ridiculously carefree. He said, 'No need to close the door, Reuben. There are no informers here.' Reuben said morosely, 'There are informers everywhere'. Paul went on wickedly, 'In Nyitso if someone overhears a conversation he does

not stop, round his ears, and listen. No, he comes straight in and says, "Repeat the first part, will you—I missed that part".

But Reuben, though he consented to open the door again, was not amused. He lowered his frame into a creaking chair and said, 'You get newspapers up here'. Paul nodded. 'Sometimes—unless the roads are too wet, or too dry, or too high, or too low. But we get them.' Reuben frowned at this levity. He said, 'Then you will know how many political arrests have been made lately, how many prominent people are among them. None of them have yet been brought to trial. Some say they never will be. The capital is sizzling. Accra has always been quick to sizzle. One of these days it will boil over. In Kumasi there is much seditious talk. Some say that one of these days the Ashantis will close the roads again.' Unconsciously he used the old expressions for a declaration of war, and unthinkingly Paul, grown serious again, replied in the same manner. 'Reuben, such a thing would be bad, a war of the flint and powder bag. We did not achieve independence to fight among ourselves like savages. Leave that to the Congolese.'

Reuben groaned. 'Paul, I'm a peace-loving man, Heaven knows', and he brandished the vivid handkerchief before the vivid shirt. His jacket he had carefully placed across the back of the chair. 'I'm a simple man with simple tastes. But in my job you hear things, many things. They're going the wrong way, Paul; political agents everywhere, spies everywhere; a regional commissioner making a speech and saying that everyone must regard himself now as a security officer. Imagine the crop of so-called information that will be reaped now. Anyone with a grudge against his neighbour can make a deposition, ruin him.' Paul thought fleetingly of his own imprisonment. He frowned uneasily. He said, 'Decent people will not be led astray by things like that'. Reuben moaned gently. He said, 'Decent people, no, real criminals, no. It's the borderline cases. People with nothing to lose, and not even the guts for crime. Jackals, that's what they are, jackals.'

Paul said, 'Reuben, you did not travel all the way to Nyitso to indulge in political discussion of a nature that would undoubtedly be regarded as seditious by the powers that be'.

Reuben said, 'Oh, no one regards me as seditious. I'm too fat.'

No one ever suspects a fat man of anything. "Good old Reub", they say, "Whisky and the night-club cuties. That's all he thinks of." But they're wrong. I think of quite a few things. I think of old friends sometimes. Paul, I can fix you a job.' He leaned earnestly across the table. 'A job abroad with a news agency. They could use you. It's semi-political, semi-international. American money of course. If you see money behind anything these days, ten to one it's American'. 'Or Russian', said Paul. Reuben gazed at him from under heavy, lowered eyelids. 'The Russians give promissory notes', he said. Paul said, 'What about a passport?' Reuben beamed. 'That's the best part of all. You know what draws everyone's attention to passports here is the fact that you have to find two persons who will stand financial surety for you. Now, under this scheme, all that is taken care of. Block surety given. So all they do is add another name to the list, and there you are, a free agent who's walked out quite openly, and your jawbone is your own again.'

Paul sat back and stared at him for a while. There was a welter of reaction in his mind but nowhere, to his own surprise, could he discern the wish to go. He could see the advantages of going, the wisdom of going. It was just the wish that was missing. In spite of misgivings, in spite of all the churning thoughts, the wish was missing. He said, 'Reuben, when must I decide?'

Reuben waved a hand expansively. 'Whenever you like. Now, in a week's time, even up to six months' time. I can fix it. That end I'm not worried about. It's this end I'm worried about. Delay too long and you may be clapped in the dungeons again.' Paul nodded. 'Reuben, you have come in great friendship. I am grateful for that, I shall probably take advantage of it. But first I should like to think, perhaps finish a couple of projects here in the village.'

Reuben snorted. 'Projects! Here!' The wave of his hand encompassed all Nyitso, and dismissed it. 'Leave them.'

Paul smiled. 'One does not pick thatch just to strew it in the forest. There are a couple of things I want to do, to complete, to tidy up in my mind if nowhere else. Now wait a moment, here's something you can do for me. Get this published.'

He picked up the paper on which he had first written down the words of Ama's song, for that was how he thought of it now.

Below it was the first draft of the melody, the notes climbing up and down the five lines of music, the bass indicated by rough pencil marks.

Reuben read it through, wrinkling his nose. He said, 'Paul, this is tripe'. 'I know', said Paul calmly. 'But so is every popular song ever written. So, fix the publication. It belongs to a young girl here. She gets the royalties. See that she gets some, even if you have to rob the petty cash.'

Reuben's eyebrows climbed up to his hair. He scanned the music and hummed it softly to himself. Presently, holding the paper at eye level, at arm's length, still humming, he began executing dance steps round the room. 'Yes', he said finally, 'A good dance band might be able to do something with it.'

He folded it up and placed it in his pocket. Paul said, 'Come. I shall offer you some refreshment at our new restaurant.'

They strolled up the road through the village and once more Reuben's eyes swept from side to side like the beam of a lighthouse. Little children came running to call out a greeting, and old men turned round to wave and smile. There were garments flapping on the bamboo fences, old women sitting crouched over cooking-pots in shaky thatched structures, and the inevitable children being soaped from head to foot as they stood in buckets. Reuben groaned. 'This village is what I call a terrible case of under-development', he said. Paul said lightly, 'Oh, I don't know, Old Mother Quartey's got a figure like the bulge of Africa.' 'You know quite well what I'm talking about', snapped Reuben. He groaned again when Paul, having settled him on a round bench surrounding one of the larger trees, brought across two bottle-gourds of frothing cocoa. 'Cocoa', he yelped. 'My God, Paul, haven't you a licence?' Paul shook his head. 'Not yet. We do things slowly here. Cocoa is our speciality. We're trying to popularize it. My cousin's wife is currently running a competition among the women to find various ways of serving it. After all, cocoa is our bread and butter, our chief, almost our only source of income. It should be our national drink.' Reuben rolled his eyes heavenwards. 'It's beautiful to hear these patriotic sentiments falling from your lips, Paul. But for God's sake get a licence. And set the place on its feet. Don't bother about doing things slowly. Where will that get you?'

The imp of mischief was still hovering near Paul's ear. He leaned towards Reuben and said earnestly, 'Reuben, what this village needs is people like you, people who bring ideas from the outside world, progressive people. Now tell me, what exactly would you do with this restaurant?'

Reuben beamed with pleasure. He said, 'That's the easiest problem I've ever tackled. First you get a licence. Then you go to—let me see—try the Tsi-Fafa Brewery. Ask them to finance a dance competition in return for a lot of advertisement. They provide prizes you see, for the best slow-step, the best high-life, the best shadow-trap. Now you build a dance floor, right here in front of your little building, the open-air stone floor type. You pay for it out of the ticket money, you see. Then you have a terrific dance, and a dancing competition. A huge bottle of Tsi-Fafa beer tilted in the middle of the floor, over a huge glass. Rainbow-coloured water pouring out and around and out again. Tables under the trees, sort of buffet supper. Set up a bar. Coloured lanterns in the trees. At midnight, stop, the surprise event. A beauty contest. Line up the cuties, handsome prize for the winner, trinkets for the rest. On with the dance. Nyitso's on the map.'

He took a draught of the cocoa thirstily and shuddered. Paul said thoughtfully, 'You know when we started this place, my cousin had ideas of that nature. It was crazy. For we started from nothing, literally nothing, just a handful of women making kenkey balls, and communal labour for building the place. Now the place is set out, the food suppliers are organized, we even have funds in hand. Somehow, the idea doesn't seem crazy anymore. All we have to do is build the dance floor and our little construction group could do that quite easily.'

Reuben said, 'Build a good floor, good and big. When you show a profit again, pull down your building and build a better one.'

Paul said, 'A horseshoe shape, with its arms curving round the floor. Tables on the horseshoe and the band in the middle of it at the head of the floor.'

Reuben nodded. 'That sounds fine. Now wait a moment. The dance band. Let me know in good time, so that I can book a good one for the competition. Tell you what. My daily paper will

stand you the band for the night. But I'll expect an increase in circulation in return.'

Paul smiled. 'Buy the *Pennant*—the paper that sets your feet a-tapping. Why don't you see that we get regular supplies?'

Reuben groaned, 'No transport running to schedule—that's my trouble. Drivers let you down. Some of them won't pay the toll to cross the Volta-Adomi bridge. Those on the other side, your side, won't go without a full load. Sometimes whole bundles come back to dispatch without even the string being untied. You can't rely on anyone, that's the trouble.'

Paul said slowly, 'I know a chap you can rely on. That's probably his only real gift—but it's the only one you want, anyway. Give him a subsidy, for a trial period anyway, to run to an early morning schedule from the bridge. Get the papers to him by a fixed time and he leaves then. I bet people will start noticing the regular run, start using it. Sometimes now, for a journey, they get up early in the morning and sit by the roadside in their villages for hours before a bus comes by.'

Reuben looked interested. 'Yes. After a while I could change the subsidy into a sales commission. What's this chap to you, anyway, relation or something?'

'No,' said Paul. 'He's nothing to me. He once lent me a lantern, that's all. Tell you what. We'll build a little news-stall here, with a platform in front. You pay for a part-time agent to receive the papers and sell them. The driver can toss the papers on the platform, bang!, like they do in big European cities. Half the village will turn out, just to see that, and some will start buying, who never thought of doing so before. And give us more features. The papers are too full of politics. We're sick of anti-colonialism. Give us a few pointers on anti-dirt and anti-disease and anti-bribery-and-corruption. Advice to the love-lorn, chats from the pulpit, and how to bathe your baby. Or a literacy campaign. Learn to read and write in ten easy lessons. Brains sent on later.'

Reuben eyed him under heavy eyelids. His eyes were bright. He said, 'You know Paul. It's a funny thing about this village. Maybe it's the fresh air. You not only get ideas but they seem possible.' They sat in silence for a while, and drank another round of cocoa, without any protest from Reuben. Paul mused. The ideas were feasible. That was the interesting part. He

recalled his first reaction to Aku's picture of that elegant restaurant. They were still a long way from it, but they were moving towards it. That was the chief thing. Moving to other goals too. Other projects would arise as time went by. He felt boundlessly confident. Then he recalled the reason for Reuben's journey, as though a cold breeze rustled the leaves above them. He said, 'Sometimes I wonder if it's worth while. You put a lot of yourself into a project. But does anybody really benefit?' Under the influence of newly-born serenity Reuben said, 'Somebody always does, sometimes the last person you'd think of. But always *somebody*. That's why it's worth while.'

Paul glanced across at him. This was a new note for Reuben. He said, 'You came here from the States, didn't you?' Reuben nodded. 'Yes from the States. I make no secret of that. Everyone knows I'm a foreigner.' He grinned at that, then continued, 'My name's my own. My great grandparents were slaves, shipped over to a southern plantation from this part of the world. Our family was lucky, they kept together even after emancipation. You know, freedom for some meant freedom to starve. But I guess we were lucky. A few years ago I got the idea of coming here, coming home so to speak, somewhere where my camouflage matched the rest. But I don't know.' He shrugged his shoulders heavily and waved his hands in an abrupt gesture. 'I guess I'm still a foreigner. Are you going to take that job?'

Paul nodded. 'I think so, Reuben. Possibly you were right that morning you said there was no real place for me here. But cut off from all the babbling, up here where people work too hard to have time for babbling, you forget. You start making plans, and getting ideas. You even wonder what it might be like to have your own wife and a child perhaps. You forget. Then something happens and you remember. But I can't go yet. I must finish off one or two things.'

'Such as?' asked Reuben.

Paul smiled again. 'Such as the great Nyitso dance.'

Beyond the valley the broad sun was sinking redly to rest. The light that remained under the trees was a quiet light. In the distance above the tree tops of the descending slopes were dark little shapes, flying vigorously to unknown destinations. Some of them came nearer and lower, with strange little calls. The

pouched bats, skimming low down over the houses. They wheeled up again above the tree tops then down along the road, back up above the trees and down over the undergrowth.

Suddenly there was a new-comer to the scene. What appeared to be a dark brown giant bat made its appearance from high up in a tree near by, gliding rapidly down till it disappeared behind the trunk of another tree. Reuben said hoarsely, 'Was that a bat?' Paul grinned. 'Another of our specialities. It's what's called a flying squirrel. Nothing supernatural.'

Reuben mopped his brow steadily for quite a while. 'Thank God for that', he said at last. 'I thought it was this damned cocoa.'

The plans for the dance went ahead with a swing. Or rather, Reuben's plan. For he had practically provided a blue-print for the scheme. Judge Wenya undertook to procure the licence, the Women's Committee foregathered to discuss the supper arrangements. The entire labour force of yard and reservoir was momentarily diverted, to throw the concrete dance floor under Herr Stüwe's glittering eye, and even he began to show signs of suppressed interest. The village was ransacked for suitable chairs and tables for the occasion. Moreover, there was a new source of enthusiastic support that had not yet been tapped. This consisted of the older children of the families who could afford the modest fees required for the secondary schools. But such children had to leave the village, to go to the plains, or the valleys, or even farther afield, which was a cause of sorrow to Aku.

Now, like Kofi and Afiba, they were home for the Christmas intermission. They were glad to be home. But they were also sorry. The village was the outer edge, the farthest limit. It was not only coasty, it was pre-coasty. It was the original Darkest Africa. It was Sheba's week-end. They did their share of the age-old drudgery and prayed for a gramophone. The prospect of the dance rippled through them like a reviving dawn breeze. They carried tables, sold tickets for miles around, and prepared torches for the light posts that they planted. In the absence of electricity the idea of coloured lanterns was regretfully abandoned. But hurricane lamps, placed behind little screens of coloured cloth added a festive note and when the Tsi-Fafa publicity man arrived to construct the mock fountain, he found hands in great number ready to help, and voices in even greater number ready to advise. In between such activities they practised assiduously for the competitions. They danced on veran-

dahs, in the courtyards, on the roadway. This was better than any festival. Festivals were the end, the outer edge, Sheba's week-end.

One morning Paul stood in the dawn light and waited for Ama to come up the road. Presently she came, walking slowly in the toe-gripped sandals, the straightened hair in its bindings carefully concealed under a head-dress wrapped in neat folds, her long skirt swaying gently. When she came up to him, she stopped and smiled. The little face looked thinner under the head-dress, but it was still a beautiful smile, so that the trees seemed for a moment to lean forward to look at it. Paul said, 'Ama, are you coming to the dance?' For the idea that a girl should wait to be invited to a dance would have seemed very strange to Ama and to all the young ones of Nyitso. Ama sighed and said slowly, 'No, Paul. I do not think I would like to go. There is sickness in the house.' Her shoulders were stooped. She looked tired. Paul felt impatient. The old man again, probably trying to die. He kicked aside a small pebble, then said, 'I am sorry. I was looking forward to a dance with you. Number eleven. The band is playing your song, the song I gave you. I brought a ticket for you.'

Her eyes lightened. 'How wonderful, Paul. A real band, playing the song. I shall try to come, then. Yes. For number eleven. You must keep it for me.' She straightened up then and went on her way, waving as she turned up the road. He felt a strange mixture of annoyance and exhilaration and pain, so that he swore at Togbe's cat when it suddenly dashed across his path, nearly tripping him up.

Paul was right about the old man. He lay on a mattress of leaves and coir and dozed and wakened and dozed again, murmuring as he dozed. But the sickness in the old man need not alone have kept Ama from the dance. It was the sickness in herself, a sickness that made her weary, weighing down her thin limbs with a great weight, so that sometimes she rested on her sewing machine, down in the valley, and surrendered herself to the weariness. Sometimes the weariness lay in her mind, so that it would float away from the conversations round her and sit up on a high point somewhere and gaze down on all the conversations, knowing that they meant

nothing, nothing at all. Sometimes the sickness seemed to leave her, so that she felt quite strong and happy, then suddenly it would attack her again, twisting her body into strange gasping bursts of coughing.

At first she did not think about it much. It was certainly the fever. That accounted for the heat of the brow. One collected certain leaves for that and drank the mixture after boiling them, and the fever died. But the brow became hot again, and the coughs were strong—deep crackling coughs in the morning mists, and harsh gasping coughs in the still night air of the hut. One collected certain leaves for coughs also and drank the mixture after boiling them, and the coughs rested a little. But they came back too.

She was not worried. Not until the Sunday morning she did some dyeing. The dyeing tree was in fruit then and in the preceding week Little Mother had collected the leaves and boiled them and left them to stand in the water where a slight fermenting process was visible. Now the blue dye was ready and they worked hard after church, dipping in the cloths, and taking them out and dipping them in again until they held the right colour. Sometimes they made patterns. A series of places along the cloth where they screwed it up into little balls, tied tightly with string. Then the dipping and the taking out and the dipping, till the cloth was blue, deep blue along one portion, light blue along the other. They untied the string now and released the cloth, which revealed bold and varied splashes of white where the dye had been unable to penetrate. They were dyeing the cloths for a trader who would pay them good money. So it was happy work. It was also tiring work and Little Mother was also thin and often afflicted with fever. Presently she went to prepare the food and Ama finished the cloths. It was then that the sickness came. First the coughing, and then the sickness seized and wrenched her, and blood gushed from her throat, so quickly that she had only enough time to turn her head, otherwise she would have spoiled the last bucket of dye.

The sickness was very strong that morning, so that she sat for a long time in the sun, on the ground with her back against the warm wall. Presently she finished the dyeing, and all the afternoon she surrendered to the sickness, just sitting in the

sun, heedless of everyone, even Togbe, who sensed that something was wrong, and played around her feet, nervously, all the time.

The three little ones played too, and their voices were shrill, but she did not heed them. They seemed a long way away, After she rested she felt quite well again.

Ama was worried now. She was a Christian and she prayed regularly in church. But just to be on the safe side she went back to the dyeing tree and gathered leaves to burn in an old pot. If any evil spirits were around, they would go away.

The weariness returned and sometimes the blood in the coughing. At last, one day, she left her place of work and went in a bus to a place far away along the valley to where there was a modern health clinic. They listened to the cough and tapped the bones round the throat and chest with little hammers and put a stick of white silver in her mouth. Ama had seen these things done in films brought by the Mobile Information van, so she felt quite interested and important. They gave her some medicine to drink, and their voices said kindly that she was not very ill but it would be better to go to a hospital. Their faces said she was very ill indeed for Ama could read their faces. She had good eyes, they could see a long way, right across the farmlands. They were eyes that had seen sickness come to other homes too. There was danger of infection. Sometimes if a sick person stayed at home, others became sick too. A sick person should not stay at home. Sometimes the health people came and took others away too, a mother from her children, or an uncle who earned wages. So when they asked her name and where she lived, she lied readily, for a strange instinct was at work in her, the instinct that makes a sick animal turn aside from its path so that it will not lead the hunters to its home.

On the way back she called at a herbalist. From him she obtained powders to burn in the room at night, after the shutters and doors were closed. It would have been better for all concerned if he had told her to open all the shutters and doors instead, but such knowledge is slow to spread and perhaps it would not have made much difference now to Ama. Her plans were quite definite. At the end of the calendar month she would receive her wages. Some she would give to Little Mother but

some she would keep. Then she would get on a bus and go all the way to the capital. There she would go to a hospital for help, perhaps get a job for a little while. But she would get away from home. In a home so poor, a sick person is no use at all to anyone, no use at all. And there was the fear of infection. After she had made the plan she felt much better. She would tell Paul she was going away to a job, and he must take care of Togbe.

The dance was a wonderful success in every way. Even before nightfall the torches were alight on the posts, the hurricane lamps gleaming behind little coloured screens. The servers were ready at their posts, now primarily engaged in guarding the long tables where the refreshments were set out. The little building itself had been converted into a bar with hanging paper decorations. Tables and chairs stood everywhere under the trees and around the new dance-floor, which gleamed with a smooth, shiny gleam.

On one side was a gigantic bottle of Tsi-Fafa beer, tilted over and pouring liquid into an equally gigantic glass. By some magical means the water continued in a circular flow, somewhere out of sight and at the back into the bottle so that an endless stream of bubbling beer poured merrily all the time. The prizes were ready for the dance contest and also for the unpublicized beauty contest.

Such a sight had never been seen in Nyitso. The poor and the puzzled and the unsophisticated edged up round the hedge of now flourishing kpoti, and gazed in wonder at the spectacle, as some of their more fortunate brethren gave up their tickets at the entrance and took seats on the scattered chairs. Nyitso representatives were there in numbers, but they were in the minority. As darkness fell, the road was constantly illuminated by headlamps, as car after car carried parties of revellers up the hill on either side of the village. They came from a world strange to Nyitso, these people with their shining clothes and astonishing coiffeurs, and loud voices and bubbling laughter. Under cover of the darkness, the crowd outside the hedge grew bigger and those in front retailed pieces of information to those at the back. There were watching children in flocks, and young mothers who took up their babies first from their cribs and wrapped them on their backs and took up their position in the crowd. There were

men too, young men who jeered to cover bewildered envy, and old men who shook their heads in bewilderment that held no envy, and old women who leaned on sticks and gazed uncomprehendingly at the transformation of their village, their people, their whole way of life.

Within the hedge moved a kaleidoscope of colour. There were men who wore the western-style black dinner jacket. There were men who wore black trousers with tuxedo-cut jackets of every colour thinkable, sky blue, scarlet, golden, and lilac. There were men who wore the kente, yards of elaborately woven cloth, of a thread that gleamed in the light. The men's variety was echoed by the women, in flaunting of colour, but the styles were mainly of two groups, one favouring the western type evening gown, one displaying the stylized version of the national dress. But all these dresses were eclipsed when Mercy appeared, stepping regally from a car and followed by a more soberly attired Attoh in black. Mercy was wearing the national dress, but transformed to an extent that called forth a long admiring groan from all the watching crowd. The flowing skirt had become a long elegant brocade sheath, slit back and front to allow the escape of rippling folds of filmy material. The upper tunic was equally transformed. In place of the pleated short upper-skirt were flowing panels of the softer cloth. The neckline was a neck-and-shoulder line, and low on the upper arms rested sleeves that were ballooning masses of brocade. It was ivory white, like the necklace that gleamed about her throat; and in her hair, masses of lacquered waves, gleamed flecks of silver and mauve and gold.

Mercy had come in answer to Reuben's plea, and had gathered up a party to bring with her. Moreover, she and Attoh had promised to give an exhibition of the shadow-trap, the latest craze of the capital, and of which they were acknowledged exponents. As the party from the capital moved into view around the dance-floor, a deep admiring sigh passed slowly through the crowd outside the hedge.

But even Mercy and her friends were eclipsed in the public interest by the band. Reuben had kept his word, and on the space next to the dance-floor, opposite the ever-renewed stream of beer, appeared the band, resplendent in black and white,

with bright blue buttonholes. Jo Mahama and his Surf Riders. They rode into Nyitso on a tidal wave of sound that engulfed it.

The drums pounded and the cymbals clashed in a manner that sent the genets and the civets loping in fear along the forest paths, and roused bewildered mongoose from their sleeping-places in the undergrowth. The languorous strains of guitars cajoled a flock of heavy hornbills towards a false dawn of brilliant light from which they recoiled in surprise, blundering clumsily amid the branches as they sought the shelter of darkness. The voices of saxophones wailed and moaned around the houses and down the hillside so that the night adders froze into immobility, or inflated themselves angrily with head to tail vibration and fierce hissing, and a solitary black cobra sliding smoothly across the roadway stopped in momentary fear, its hood spread menacingly.

Paul moved gaily in the midst of gaiety. Thrown to one side were the misgivings and doubts and fears; with them were the ambitions, the hopes, the plans. There was no past and no future, just the present, a present filled with colour and laughter, a present filled with rhythmic melody. Dances and dance contests and at midnight the crowning of an excited beauty queen amid roars of applause, and fanfares from the band.

Gaiety and music that allowed no echoes from two voices that tried to speak; one whispering to him to ignore all dangers, to stay in the village where he had so quickly made for himself a place, to stay with people to whom he could give, in his way, so much, and who could give him in return, in their way, so much; the other warning him that there was no real place for him here, that the cloud of suspicion, though hovering so lightly, was still there and likely to spread, to hover over others who came too close to him. Both somehow linked with a strange emptiness in the gaiety and a way his eyes had of glancing all round and through the crowd.

Ama was not at the dance. There was sickness in the house, the old man probably. Why didn't he die and have done with it? He had given her a ticket and she had said she would come. But she was not here. If everyone behaved like Ama, the dance would be a complete flop. And, after all, what was it for? For funds, and publicity that would result in more funds, for the

restaurant and therefore for the reservoir, for Nyitso, for people like Ama. Of course, she never gave him a thought. She had thoughts only for that ridiculous household of misfits. There was no reason why he should allow his own enjoyment to be spoiled. He was enjoying himself to the full; there was no past and no future, just the present, a present filled with rhythmic melody.

Mercy and Attoh gave a wonderful demonstration of the shadow-trap. Some of the torches were quenched and fresh ones placed low so that the dance-floor became a pool of shadows and the band played with a mesmerizing staccato beat that stilled everyone to silence, the revellers inside the hedge and the watchers outside it. Amid the shadows whirled Mercy's gleaming ivory gown. The applause was tumultuous, that from outside the hedge predominating over that from the inside.

Then came number eleven, which Mahama announced as 'By Special Request. Nyitso's own song; moving over hot keys fass-terr than a lizard over hot rocks. Ladies and Gentlemen, Ama's Song'.

It is surprising what a good dance band can do with any song, and Ama's song was no exception. The Surf Riders sent the tripping melody gaily trotting round the floor till the throng trotted gaily with it, caught up by the infectious cheerfulness. Then the guitars predominated and the tempo became slow and smooth like a gliding stream, till a mood of quietness took possession of the dancers. Then the guitars gave way to the saxophones, the tenor saxophone wailing nostalgically and the alto moaning yearningly while the rhythmic beat of the high-life returned and the floor became a whirl of twisting, poising, turning figures.

Paul danced with Ama. Just after the music started she appeared at his side. She was a quivering wisp of excitement and her eyes were lustrous. She said, 'Quickly, Paul. I have come to dance with you', and before he had time to organize the new thoughts that came leaping upon old thoughts, he was in the midst of the dancers, with a new, amazing Ama, who wore a western style dress, simply cut and flowing, and of a soft blue colour. Her hair was revealed now, the painstakingly straightened hair, swept round into deep coils, and the

long, fragile golden earrings gleamed in the fitful light.

They trotted merrily with the drums and swayed quietly with the guitars, and Ama laughed as they stepped out with the saxophones into the high-life of abrupt steps and turns, laughed breathlessly, and once or twice paused in her dancing. They seemed to be alone on the roadway once more, dancing in the dawn light, and Ama was lightly clapping her hands.

Then the dance ended and Ama was gone, a gleam of blue darting through the crowd. For a moment Paul stood in bewilderment, then he laughed. She had come, for number eleven, as she had said she would. Now he remembered her words quite clearly. He laughed again. Strange child. He felt strange too, strangely happy, as though there was no past and no future, just the present.

When the last dance had ended and all the strangers had gone back to the world beyond Nyitso, and a moonlight peace once again lay over the village, the forests and the farmlands, he walked slowly down the road to the small, dark house, and laughed again. Then he began to sing, softly, to himself and to the nightjars.

‘Over Avetili there’s a midnight sky,
Over Avetili there’s a moon sails high.’

For days the little episode stayed in Paul’s mind. The more he thought about it the more attractive it became. To come excitedly just like that, just for one dance, for the dance he had written for her, to whirl away again at the end of it. It was like one of those stories that appeared among nations who have a wonderful, developed literature, a heroine with a sensitive imagination. To have it happen here in Nyitso. It was like a story. It was a story—his story. He would turn it into words, delicate, sensitive words, to match a strange little heroine.

For quite a few days there was no sign of Ama, so one morning in the dawn light, he waited on the grass bank, and watched the road sloping away among the trees with the one star visible in the ribbon of sky. But Ama did not come. Lately she seemed to have altered her habits. So towards evening, he waited again, waited while two or three buses swept by. ‘You Too Can Fly’

went wheezing and flapping by on its way back from the plains and Driver Joe waved cheerfully as he passed. He came from the valley side every morning now, more or less at the same time. He brought batches of the *Daily Pennant* which he flung off at various points on the way, Nyitso was one of these points, and one of the women who helped with the restaurant was acting as newsagent. Next week they would build a proper little stall for her, with a platform in front of it, and the pile of newspapers would descend on to it, bang!, as the bus swept by. It was an exhilarating prospect. Quite a few people gathered already for the little ceremony although the bang yielded by the generally soft earth was nothing compared to that which a strong platform would provide. The fact that the bus stopped sedately only a few yards farther on was quite beside the point. 'Hiya Baby' came by too, from the plains, and then came a couple from the valley side, 'God is Still Above' followed by 'Try your Luck'.

Presently Ama came walking down the road, her dress swaying gently. She was bare-headed, so that the new hair style was displayed, and the long earrings. She stopped and smiled, and then she sat beside him on the bank. She said, 'Paul, I am going away to the capital. I am taking a job there. Will you care for Togbe while I am away?' He said slowly, 'Yes, of course. I think I shall arrange a small job for him on the reservoir where he will be safe and useful too.' She said, 'Thank you Paul. You have always been our friend.' The evening was very cool after the heat of the day, almost cold. Then he remembered. He said, 'Ama, why did you slip away like that after only one dance?' Her eyes widened and she said earnestly, 'Oh Paul, I hired the dress, for one dance only. I paid the hire just for one dance.'

He said, 'How can you hire a dress, just for one dance?' She nodded her head vigorously. 'From a college girl, from the training college in the valley. Some of them came to our place to have their dresses made. This one was the same shape as I am. So I asked her to hire it to me for the one dance. She came out to meet me under the trees and I put on the dress. That was why I hurried. She was waiting for me to come back after the dance you see.'

He gave a short little laugh. Well, that was one way of ending

a romantic story. Ama said, 'I shall say good-bye now, Paul, because soon I shall be leaving'. She stood up in the road and smiled down at him. She said, 'Sleep well. May the day break on you', and then turned and walked down the road. At the turn to the bush path, she turned and waved. He waved too, and he stood quite a while in the darkening roadway. By the kpoti hedge that the children had planted there were small zephyr lilies in flower, white petals visible in the shadows. Beside the roadway were wild red cannas, and in the distance under the trees there was a patch of mauve swamp orchid. One never noticed them coming into flower, till suddenly they appeared everywhere at once. That was how it seemed. It was distinctly cold. The air was still. Then a light movement seemed to pass through it so that it touched face and arms with cold fingers. Paul raised his face to the sky. 'The Harmattan', he said, for nobody's benefit least of all his own. He went up the path to the house.

PART 5



The Time of Violence

❖ 13 ❖

The Harmattan was blowing, a powerful silent wind that swept ceaselessly down and across the vast northern spaces of the continent. It was like an invader, a terrible invader, knowing nothing of anger and nothing likewise of mercy. It existed of itself and for itself. It fulfilled itself and all other things were merely incidental to it. As it passed over the Sahara it gathered up multitudinous grains of yellow desert sand. When it reached the grasslands it gathered up other grains, of black dried-out soil, and of red, baked earth. Slowly it transformed itself into an invisible cloud of hot, dry dust, stifling and smothering all living things in its path. There was little effect on hearing, for it came silently; little effect on sight, for it remained practically invisible, so that all that one noticed was an unusual opaqueness in the air, a stronger quivering in the layers of heat, a strange reddish tinge in the clouds that moved wearily across the sky. Near at hand the trees and the undergrowth were a fresh shining green, but, step back a few yards and one gazes at a mummified world; shape and colour remain, but life is drained away.

The attack was on the three remaining senses, on touch, taste, and smell. The skin dried and withered in it, it crept into the folds of the nose and throat with insidious torture. In the hours of darkness it lay clammily cold, a mummified cold; in the hours of daylight it burned with a dreadful heat so that heat and invisible dust were like poison in minds imprisoned in stifled bodies. Little wonder if a new tension became apparent inhuman relationships, a tension that would grow and then snap asunder in deed of sudden violence.

The paradox of the seasons was again in evidence. Nyitso lay in the Northern hemisphere. Technically it was mid-winter, nearly the end of the calendar year; yet it was the period of greatest

heat, fierce, dry, torturing heat, with clammy coldness in night fogs; the rule of the Harmattan.

Away to the west, the great Volta trembled and shrank slowly from its banks, islands rising higher and higher out of the water. At the mouth new bars of sand appeared and on them and in the shallow pools lay motionless monsters awaiting a movement and a prey, tiny eyes above the long, hideous snout, miniature legs resting beside a lumbering body of scales.

The farmlands were still. The main cocoa crop was long since gathered. The second maize crop was long since harvested. Now there was nothing to do but wait, wait for the life-giving rains when the yams and the first maize would be planted, and tiny trees of avocado pear and pawpaw could be entrusted to the soil. Now they stood in rows, in old rusty tins, sheltered under makeshift roofs of thatch. To plant now would invite to them a drying death. The tomato plants were withered sticks, the bananas that still grew were tasteless in the mouth and softened cloyingly within hours of picking. The depletion of the maize stores and the yam had to be controlled. There was money from cocoa. But one cannot eat money.

The hunters were out in the forest. Sometimes they went by day, more often they went by night, with little lamps tied to their foreheads, for a disturbed, drowsy, bewildered animal was a surer victim. This was not the strange ritual of hunting for sport, when well-fed men take death-dealing weapons and pit their wits against the instincts of wild animals. This was hunting for food, for bellies whose fullness or emptiness seems to dominate all codes of behaviour. There were no niceties of behaviour between man and beast. The only ritual was the seeking of the luck-giving herb whose leaves would be placed in the gun for a time before the hunting, so that good fortune would attend the hunter.

Nor did they place their trust entirely in weapons. There was poison in plenty in the fruits of the trees, poison to be had merely for the plucking. The fruits were slowly boiled in water pots and the liquid poured into open calabashes placed at certain points in the forest. The animals were thirsty in the heat. Soon they drank and soon they died.

Sometimes there was a bustle in the village. The Fulanis

came, driving their cattle, for this was the time of money and the time of little food. The cattle would not live long in the hills, for the tsetse fly awaited them. But this did not matter; they were not destined for life, but for death, for food. The market place hummed with activity and noise when a Fulani drover appeared with a small herd and took his place in the village. The cattle grazed on the open places and every day one was slaughtered by the butcher and the meat laid out on the stalls of the market under the little roofs of palm thatch. There was no time for the meat to go bad. It was purchased eagerly, in its entirety, with cocoa money, and these days with labour money too. It was a strange idea, selling labour for money. It was not like that in the old days. Then you put your labour into the creation of something, a maize cob, a piece of woven cloth. One you ate, the other you sold. It was yours till you sold it. Now you put your labour into something that was never yours. You could neither eat nor sell it. It belonged to someone else. You took money for your labour. What happened after that was no concern of yours. It was a strange idea. Strange ideas bring tension too, tensions as great as those brought by the Harmattan, and sometimes they snap asunder just as loudly.

The poison was not only for the animals. It was for the fish too. As the streams dried up it was easy to dam little pools. Sometimes the poison fruits were boiled, the liquid cast into the pools. Sometimes the poison leaves were pounded and strewn over the surface of the pools, a mantle of death. Soon the fish came into the dammed-up pools, and soon they died and floated and were eaten. Amid the fish coiled the water snakes caught too in the damned up pools, lines of grey and brown and scarlet.

The snakes were hunters too, and some of them were armed with death-dealing weapons of an efficiency greater than the guns carried by the human hunters. Green mambas were like the lilies. No one noticed them till they were there, then suddenly they were everywhere at once, slithering across the paths and through the undergrowth, balancing with beautiful, controlled muscular tension on the branches of trees. They hunted small animals and birds and if man interrupted them at their task they turned on him, a momentary quivering of

forked tongues and a piercing into the flesh of venom-filled fangs. For sometimes man and mamba were in competition, seeking the flesh of the grey dormice and little forest mice. Man's weapon against these was smoke, pouring through old tree trunks or dried-up undergrowth, and fire was perhaps the snake's most dreaded enemy.

Pathetic victims of the hunt were the black chimpanzees, who preyed on nothing, but sometimes availed themselves of the freedom of the farmlands to take a share of man's food. More often they shared his drink, climbing up the tall fan palms to where a calabash was tied to catch the wine as it oozed out from incisions. A deep draught, a slow return to the ground, and a staggering walk as the fermenting liquor sent fumes into fuddled little brains. Then they would pound their fists on anything that gave a loud noise in return, the louder the better, hollow trunks, bamboo fences, best of all a discarded piece of corrugated iron, screaming hideously with joy. But this was when they were drunk with palm-wine. When they were sober they fled before man into the depths of the forest.

So it was a grim contest between hunter and hunter, between hunter and victim and sometimes between victim and victim. The law of the jungle is the usual phrase. Perhaps it should rather be called the law of the dry, burning heat, the law of the Harmattan.

In Nyitso tension increased slowly. Christmas was past, a quiet time with none of the revelry attached to it in colder climes. Revelry belonged to the festivals. Yet the new faith had brought some of its customs. One was the family reunion. Many homes were filled to overflowing. Aku's house was one of these, with the excess spilling over into Paul's house. Aku's two married sons returned from the valley, with their wives, and the two new babies; there were older children, many older children, so that Paul never quite succeeded in knowing which child belonged to which parent. For beside the sons, there were cousins, many cousins, and there were some with whom even Aku could find no trace of kinship, so that he was reluctantly driven to describe them merely as friends.

There was a little pageant on Christmas Eve on the open space beside the church. There was a sturdy schoolboy St.

Joseph with a cotton-wool beard and a rather tremulous Mary who held a borrowed baby in her arms, a little brown Christ Child who grew angry at intervals and gave out lusty roars. There were shepherds in plenty and numbers of sheep who cropped the grass composedly in the torchlight. The three kings moved regally in heavy robes and angels hovered in the background.

Everyone crowded the roadway to watch, from Christians who found absorbing beauty in the little tableau, to those who found it merely of passing interest. The pagan element who had gradually infiltrated into the village were there too and they gazed wide-eyed. Here was something displayed that they all comprehended, a mother and her child. In the recesses of racial memory lay visions of warfare, and slavery, and polygamy which had robbed the father of his place in their emotions, so that they gave it to the mother along with her own place. So now Christian and pagan alike stood silently, then gave a deep admiring sigh as Mary raised the baby up before the shepherds and quaveringly recited her lines. This was no new faith. There was nothing new to understand here. This was something they all understood already—a mother with her child. Even the Fulani drover felt quite at home. He had been pressed into service as escort to two puzzled cows who leaned inquisitively over a bamboo screen and gazed at the lighted scene with large sad eyes.

Then came the singing of carols. At first the practised choirs sang, on the open place, with rows of children in front, holding hurricane lamps swinging from long bamboo poles, but presently one after another of the watchers joined in till Nyitso was transformed into a glorious wave of song in which all voices found instinctively their places in the harmony. The song soared up above the lamplight and the torchlight into the darkness of the tree tops, drifting into the folds of darkness as the trees stood motionless against a starlit sky.

On Christmas Day there was a dinner of course, rather better than usual, but eaten with dispatch so that soon each verandah had its full quota of loungers. In Aku's house there was a little whisky for the sophisticated, and one or two close friends exchanged small gifts, rather shyly. There was no talk of

children's parties, for the older children were too busy helping to prepare and serve the food and the little ones were content to tumble underfoot. Admittedly Seth and Kofi provided a diversion by suddenly appearing in the roadway in weird paper hats and executing a wild comic dance for the benefit of the verandah audience.

But now Christmas was past, and the Harmattan ruled and the tension grew, ready to break into violence. The first incident had its comic side, and poor hardworking Afua was the centre of it. It occurred at noon one day. It was a day of crackling heat, the grass dry and yellowed, showing patches of burnt earth that shouted fiercely at the sun. There had been customers from a passing bus, but now all were gone save two travellers who lingered in the serving place. A man came walking slowly up the path with the shambling gait of one who has recently looked deep into a calabash of palm-wine. In the serving-room he paused and his eyes wandered over the platters of food.

As Afua returned, bearing the two orders for the two customers, the man was engaged in inspecting a plateful of cocoanut cakes. He picked up each one in turn, eyed it sneeringly, and replaced it on the plate. The cakes were syrupy in the heat. Occasionally, between inspections, he licked his fingers. Afua was incensed. Not for nothing had she recently attended the course on food-hygiene run by the Women's Council with a smart young lady in a smart white overall, all the way from Kumasi. Moreover, this was a public place, and the days of community eating from a common dish were over. Afua said sharply, 'Take your hands from the cakes'. The man gazed at her leeringly. He said, 'Do you own this place?' 'I do not', said Afua sharply. In a sense she did. She was paid for her work but she was also a shareholder like the other women. But that would have been too involved to explain to a drunken man. Besides she was not too sure why he asked. He made it clear. He sneered again. 'So, when the leopard is not at home, the civet cat becomes a lion.' Worse, he was still holding one of the cakes, grinding it slowly to sticky crumbs in his hand. Suddenly he threw them at her. Afua held two plates, one containing groundnut soup, the other curry and rice. For a moment she hesitated between the two. The soup won. With a furious cry

she crashed the bowl over the man's head. It was his turn for a moment's inaction. He stood with the fragments of plate in his hair, the soup draining over face and shoulders. Then the heat of the soup penetrated. With a wild yell he began scooping the soup from his face and neck with hands that burned in turn. By this time Afua was armed. She seized a pestle and belaboured the man out of the restaurant and down the path, till he gave up the unequal contest and started off at a run, down the road, almost sobered by the episode, while Afua paused, pestle in hand, wiping crumbs from her face as she shouted. 'So runs the goat when the leopard's door is open.' She panted back up the path to the little building where her two customers awaited her. One of them was Afua's Indian patron, who came by quite regularly these days, and who had watched in petrified amazement as the contest had developed at lightning speed before his eyes. With a return to habitual composure he now took up the plate of curry and rice saying urbanely, 'I think this is my order', and retired outside beneath the trees while Afua applied some soothing beaten yam to the hand of the other customer who had received upon it some of the hot soup and was making loud outcry.

It was all soon over, although the disturbance had aroused quite a few people who came trotting up hastily to see what was happening, so that there was still quite a little crowd when Constable Labi came plodding heavily on the scene to investigate and to receive several accounts of the incident, all completely at variance. After the seventh true story, he gave it up in despair, and as nobody seemed to be injured or to have other ground for complaint, he snapped closed his notebook and returned to the peaceful solitude of the police station for a midday siesta.

Constable Labi was getting on in years, both in age and length of service. He had never had any promotion and the fact had never worried him. Towards crime he preserved a philosophical demeanour. As long as it did not give trouble, it could in turn be left undisturbed. So he returned to the police station and lowered his burly frame into a chair preparatory to the siesta.

He was left in peace that day, and the next, and perhaps the next, but not after that, because it was about this time that the

poultry thief appeared in the village, a thief who took one bird at a time from a household, always the finest bird, and vanished away. The thefts were the more noticeable in that poultry had recently sprung into increased prominence. There were not too many birds in the village, because they did not thrive too well in the forested hills, not as well as they did in the grassy plains and far away towards the seashore, round the great lagoons where one could see whole flocks of chickens and guinea-fowl and large numbers of ducks and even quite a few turkeys. Up here the fowls were rather small, anxious-looking creatures, with one eye cocked ever heavenwards where the brown hawks wheeled and swerved in menacing manner. By day they scratched and clucked in the undergrowth, pitting their wits against the leaping insects. At night they returned, each to its own home, to the richer homes, where neat little fowl-houses of bamboo were raised up from the ground on sturdy legs of whittled wood, to the poorer homes where they merely found themselves perches on verandah or courtyard, to the poorest of all where the door gave on to a brushed area without benefit of verandah, so that the fowls stalked gravely inside and perched up in the roof on lengths of bamboo placed across the tops of the walls.

The hens laid their eggs and hatched them out and led forth their broods into a world of danger where sickness would kill some and hawks would take others. Of the number left, the cockerels in due course would be killed for the cooking-pot, so that the young hens left to grow into maturity were few in number and the flocks showed slow increase. Now the birds were disappearing one by one, the finest of the birds, so that sickness could not account for failure to return home, the largest of the birds, so that the hawks could not be charged with the crime. A human thief was at work.

It was an evil day for the village if it could no longer allow its fowls to wander freely amidst known dangers. Moreover, at the course in food-hygiene, the smart young lady in the smart white overall had spoken strongly in favour of feeding eggs to young children, at least one egg a week. She drew diagrams and pictures on a little blackboard and all the women present gazed with great interest. It was clever, it was impressive, it was

undoubtedly all very true. For most of them it was revolutionary. Feeding eggs to children. They discussed it among themselves. Surely it was better to feed a child on yam and maize so that its little belly grew round and shiny above its wobbly legs. In some the reaction was that of incredulousness. To others it had social implications—it was all very well for the wealthier ones who could afford these food-fads. Others again found the whole idea displeasing. Egg-eating put one on a level with the snakes, the small pale snakes who slithered up the trees to rob the nests of the birds and the lizards, stretching their mouths over the egg in one strong, convulsive, horrible movement.

Hence the fowl-thief chose the wrong moment to commence his depredations, for the birds were high on the list of matters of public interest. Moreover had he been merely hungry for bird-flesh, he would have sought out the bush fowl which whirred over or scurried across practically every path in the farmlands, for now it was their breeding time. They were wary and elusive, but not beyond the skill of a determined hunter. So, taken all in all, it seemed fairly clear that the thief was stealing for the sake of selling.

Constable Labi, sitting massively in the police station, pondered over all these facts. The birds were being caught by day, since they failed to return home to roost, and removed by night since no one had been seen on the roadway. The regularity of the thefts suggested that they were being taken to a market within reasonable reach of the village; there were three markets in the valley that might be suitable. They were being taken by someone who came and went without anyone having cause to comment on his movements. At this point the solution stared Labi in the eyes. It was obviously one of the valley labourers now engaged on the work of building the reservoir. After work stopped in the afternoon he made his catch, waited till darkness fell and then made his way unchallenged, homewards, to the valley, where he probably had an accomplice who disposed of the birds at one of the markets during the day.

Constable Labi reached this conclusion at four o'clock one afternoon, and as he reached it a broad smile spread itself happily right across his face. That night he would settle the matter. For this was in the line of duty and Labi walked

stauchly if phlegmatically the path of duty. There was a point beyond which crime could not go; if it did it became troublesome. The fowl-thief had gone beyond this point. To steal two birds, even three. One might reasonably blink the eyes, but the known tally had already reached nine. Nine birds, perhaps more, from one village was in the worst possible taste. Moreover the villagers were beginning to mutter angrily and to make pointed remarks when he strolled majestically along the roadway or appeared alongside one of the trading stalls.

That evening he cycled off as usual, but at a suitable spot near the foot of the hillside he dismounted, concealed the cycle behind some trees and himself behind others. It was merely a matter of time. The sun sank behind the western hills, the tropical night descended swiftly over the valley and climbed steadily up the hills. One or two people passed by, then the scene emptied of humans. It was quite a long wait, during which the attentions of the mosquitoes did little to improve his outlook, but he was still his heavily composed self when the marauder at last made his appearance on the road, padding quietly along, with a bird under his arm.

He stepped out from cover and seized man and bird in an iron grip. That was that. It was almost too easy. It was Markwei, one of the labourers from the valley, now working on the reservoir. He was a great political wrangler, so that he became known popularly as Karl Marx. During one lunch-hour argument he was pushed into a pool of the river and emerged dripping wet and furious, as his feet left large squelching imprints in the mud. Thereafter he was known as Wet Marks.

But there is another paragraph to this chapter. Labi keenly resented some of the whispered comments in the village, hissed questions by which one villager inquired of another if there was a fixed sum as 'dash' for the constable, to close his eyes to theft. Labi had a moral code. A policeman's duty was in a sense divisible into two types of activity. One was negative, in the sense of deterring or apprehending evil-doers, one was positive in the way of granting certificates of ownership of vehicles, or bicycle licences, or such. In the former case, he held himself above bribery; in the latter case it was only natural that the performance of a service, even a service in the line of duty,

should be rewarded by a small, preferably monetary gift. Now he had his reputation to consider. He revived an old custom, which was slowly dying out. Next morning he took the protesting bird and tied it firmly to one of Markwei's arms. The other he handcuffed securely to himself.

Thus accompanied, he set out for the village by bus, and having arrived proceeded to parade up and down the roadway. The old custom revived immediately in a spontaneous rebirth. From all sides they came running, the children, the adults, the aged. They called out in satisfaction, then they jeered at the thief. As they jeered, the voices rose and fell instinctively in peculiar cadence, well-nigh forgotten, a sound not heard in the village for many years, a peculiar rising whoop repeated again and again, and interspersed with descending cries that mocked.

'Whoop, Whoop', they cried, 'Behold our brave thief. Whoop, Whoop, O great warrior of the barnyard. Whoop, Whoop. O daring invader of the cooking-pots.' Their voices rose and fell. The whooping rose up on high. It called to others, and they too came running. They left everything, the vegetable patches, the kitchens, the market place, the new company yard, even the reservoir.

'Whoop, Whoop', they cried out. Wet Marks shambled shamefacedly alongside the burly, satisfied form of Constable Labi until such time as the latter felt that honour had been vindicated and justice seen to be done, when he returned to the valley with his captive, and the strange whooping cry died away into the echoes.

For a while the tension almost visibly relaxed. The birds returned to their homes of an evening, and no drunken customers appeared in the restaurant. Yet it was an uneasy spell, a breathing time after which the tension would slowly mount again.

The next moment of trouble arrived from the larger world beyond Nyitso. Madam Rosalie walked over to the site office one morning with disappointing news that the oil company had finally made the polite but firm decision not to build a petrol station in the village. It was a foreign company, of course, as were all the larger companies in every sphere, not only petrol. She said sadly, 'The injection of money would have been so

useful. The men would have sold their labour, and we would have sold blocks, and that would have taken care of a part of our reservoir loan.' Paul walked up and down the small office for a few minutes. He said finally, 'We could, I suppose, build the place ourselves, and again put our trust in the future, hoping to make profits from the sale of petrol'.

'They suggested that very course', she replied. 'They would be willing to supply us with petrol at the usual trade rates but they would require immediate cash payment for their supplies to us. They are quite definite on that point. They say they are not prepared to invest their capital in assets such as buildings at the present time.' 'In other words', said Paul, 'They haven't much confidence in the economic stability of the country.'

For a moment he gritted his teeth and felt a surge of rage. This was colonialism again, in another form, the exploiting foreigners who wanted profit with no risk. Madam Rosalie said thoughtfully, 'I wish I knew more about commerce and economics. I can understand quite well how we can channel some of the money in the country so that it flows through this village, but I am not at all sure how money rises in the country in the first place. Is cocoa the only way?' Paul said, 'At the start I took the view that that very point was no concern of ours, that is, the economic life of the country as a whole, not just Nyitso. Now it looks as though we shall be forced to consider it, and wandering into economics, in this country, means wandering into politics. Every damn thing here is filled to overflowing with politics.'

For a moment the rage returned, this time directed against his own people whose leaders seemed to be so engaged in yapping their heads off about African unity and non-alignment and what the United Nations should be doing that they had neither time nor energy left for the hard solid work of building up the economic life of the country which cried aloud for it. Not that he expressed his thoughts aloud. Madam Rosalie was a party member, like her father, a fact to be borne in mind, however helpful they might be. He reminded himself grimly that he had no desire to be imprisoned again on a charge of defaming the president or something similar.

Presently he said, 'Perhaps we could persuade one of the merchant trading companies to establish a branch here'.

She shook her head. 'Do you remember the cocoa boycott of 1937? I remember it very well, although I was only a schoolgirl then. The cocoa farmers refused to sell any cocoa to the buying firms who had made a secret buying agreement to control the price. They also boycotted the firms' retail stores. Commercial life practically came to a standstill. It was a bad time but it was the time when we learned our power. I think independence would have come soon after that, but the war years came, and delayed it. The trouble is that as we learned power, the foreign firms learned caution. They won't risk their money. They won't invest in assets such as buildings. Down in the valley villages you can see quite a number of former branches, empty and closed. They are all keeping their activities within well-defined limits.'

Paul said 'Hell'. He said it three times in a growling voice. Then he said, 'The American loan for the Volta dam was granted'. Madam Rosalie continued, 'I read in my paper that foreign governments were lending us some £35,000,000. That sounds colossal. Yet the very same paper said that an English company wanted to buy up another company for £200,000,000. Imagine! One company. That set me thinking. It struck me that this loan is not so much a serious investment as the tip, the handout that you give to some pestilential beggar who whines after you down the road, so that eventually you give him some money and tell him to go away.'

There was something in this that struck at every bit of self-respect that Paul possessed. He cried out, 'Why the hell can't we build up the country ourselves, by our own efforts? Why should they lend us anything? It's their money.'

Madam Rosalie said quietly, 'Precisely'.

They were silent for a while, then Paul said, 'Well that's one scheme we shall have to shelve. We can sell the blocks to small contractors in the plains, but it won't be much of a venture—still', he shrugged his shoulders. She rose to go. 'Well, I've no more bad news', she said. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' She smiled, the slow silky smile he had noticed at their first meeting, and went on her way, cautiously stepping over the tufts and mounds of the uneven ground, with ultra-modern high-heeled shoes.

If Madam Rosalie had no more bad news for the day, Aku had. He was unusually silent during the evening meal, but after a while announced morosely, 'Francis has applied to the education department for a transfer and I have recommended it. When we calmed down we agreed that he should make the grounds of his application the fact that the village provides little scope for either his musical or athletic interests, and that he would like to work in a larger centre. Of course, this is quite true.' He was silent for a while, then added, 'I shall miss him. He was very good with the school band.'

Paul noticed the 'when we calmed down'. He said, 'You had a disagreement with Francis?'

Aku frowned. He looked quite miserable. He said, 'We have had quite a few disagreements lately. Once I asked him if we could not encourage indigenous music in the school; you know I had an idea of a sort of band with our customary drums and bamboo flutes and so on. He was quite rude about it. Yet next day he was almost hysterical because he found two of the girls smoking cigarettes in the classroom. Talked about wicked foreign ideas undermining our customs and so on. There have been quite a few similar matters. Frankly I don't understand him at all. One minute he wants everything to be so up to date that everything traditional is despicable. The next minute he's talking about ancient customs and how they should be honoured. Really, I think he must have one of these complexes.'

Paul controlled a smile and allowed it no lingering on his face. He thought Aku's view of Francis oddly like his own view of Aku. He said, 'What happened about the smoking girls?' Aku brushed that to one side with an abrupt gesture. 'Two ten year olds. I don't know where they got the cigarettes but they just made themselves sick. That'll teach them quicker than anything I could say to them.'

He relapsed into frowning silence and Paul left it to him to return to the topic. Eventually he said, 'The last argument was because I found he had taught his class a long chant. It started off 'Our noble president, messiah and redeemer'. I was furious. I've told him before that I won't tolerate blasphemy or anything that approaches blasphemy. He accused me of lack of patriotism. I said that true patriotism couldn't grow in the soil

of personality cults. I even tried to reason with him. I said, 'Look here, Francis, one doesn't build up a nation just for a year or two, but for the future, as well as now, for years and years, for generations. You can't link up that feeling with an expendable personality.' He was aghast, absolutely aghast. He said, 'Never could I have expected to hear even you talk of our leader in that phrase', and he walked out of the room. So it seems the best thing we can do is to part. I hope the next young teacher I get is more restful.'

Paul shifted about in his chair. Alale had entered the room and was standing in a lazy attitude, half leaning against the door. Paul said, 'I take it the views you express are actually your views'. Aku was surprised, 'Of course. I trust I'm as patriotic as anyone. I think anyone who helps our nation in any way, particularly those in responsible positions, is entitled to our full support. But they must not become so embedded in the public mind that their death, for example, would leave chaos.'

Alale smiled widely. 'Every day in the paper there is a photograph of some minister or other signing something or other. The number of contracts and agreements must be stupendous by now. Perhaps they have also signed an agreement with death.'

Aku snorted. 'They must die too', he said.

Paul said sharply, 'For God's sake Aku, do not talk in that manner'.

There was a distinct pause during which Aku and Alale looked at him steadily. The smile had died away from Alale's eyes. She frowned slightly. Aku said, 'Cousin Paul, when you first came back, I marvelled at you that you seemed to bear no marks of your experience. Now I am not sure. I think they have frightened you.'

Paul cried, 'Aku. I am frightened, and frightened for you. I know how harmless your words are, but in other ears they could sound like threats, like subversion, like plots to murder. Especially when you deal with people so unbalanced as Francis. For God's sake, take care.'

Aku was composed, now, more composed than Paul had ever seen him. He said, 'Cousin Paul, I am a patriot and a conscientious teacher. I labour for my people. I am a man of truth too. I shall continue to speak freely whatever I feel is the truth. I mean

harm to no man. If my words are interpreted that way then let them imprison me too, shoot me if they like. I am not afraid. When I become afraid, then life will no longer have any meaning.'

Paul turned swiftly to look up at Alale. He said, 'And what about you? Have you no concern for your husband's safety?'

Alale was smiling again. She said lazily without any affectation, 'We are committed to a real Messiah, a real Redeemer'.

Paul was silent. It was an avowal of faith such as one seldom heard in Africa. In Europe it would have been respected, but it would also have been considered as being in bad taste.

❧ 14 ❧

The heat had increased, a merciless heat, yet the sun's rays seemed to have a peculiar quality of invigoration so that, even as they burned and destroyed, they drew forth a fresh, brilliant life from the earth. The hillsides were transformed. The heavy leaf-fall of the deciduous trees robbed them of the covering mantle of glowing green. The evergreens shrank into the background, yielding pride of place to the tall, grey boles, stretching up to end in a majestic outspread of slim, bare branches. The transformation continued. Each silk-cotton tree became a tossing ball of bright scarlet flowers, perched on a thin line of silvery grey. The fruits split in the heat and thousands of seeds appeared, tiny dark seeds, each thickly surrounded and winged, by long white furry threads. They hung for a while against the sky, and then floated slowly to the earth to lie there, thick and white, a strange tropical snow.

Glimpses of deeper red where the parrot trees also bore their flowers. Gleams of bright yellow where the loufah flowers spread their petals wide in the sunshine.

The colours that gleamed on the tree tops glowed also in the soil. The angry, purple spathes of the forest lilies died away like scabbards falling from cream swords which in turn became tightly-rolled leaves, slowly unfolding and spreading out like ridiculous, tattered parasols. What they lost in dignity, the pink lily recouped, with flowers statuesquely beautiful in rich salmon pink.

There were less flamboyant flowers which sheltered from the heat and the dust in the cool shade of the undergrowth, creeping into ditches and peering from under the hedges, tiny flowers of pale mauve, dark blue, and white.

The mornings were busy with the activities of the palm swifts. They spread out their wings in a wide graceful curve, so that

they seemed to be nothing but wings, with only a thin dark line to denote the tiny body, and the tail folded for flight. Competing with them for lodging in the palms were the soft tomb bats; while the clumsy fruit bats screamed for joy at the flowering of the silk cotton trees and beat and tacked their way around the trees like little yachts in a sea of heat.

It was a time of brilliance, the brilliance of meteors, and like meteors preordained to a plunging death.

In the midst of this time, the reservoir suddenly became the centre of unrest. It was as Aku had said on the day they commenced to repair the road. When you give your labour you pour it out freely; when you are paid for it you measure it, very carefully. So the labourers now measured their labour. They measured it against each other, against the demands of the headmen, against the payment offered. They measured it too, as men will do everywhere, against the labour of the women and tried to edge into the 'walk-about' jobs while leaving the work to the women. This was difficult, for the women were not labourers but concrete-carriers. They bore the concrete in headpans from the mixer to the tipping point. They did not take up a shovel, spade, or pick.

The women worked on, uneasily aware of attempted exploitation, and yet, like women everywhere, having to be severely jolted before they would band together to safeguard their rights.

Matters came to a head one day when Herr Stüwe summarily dismissed three men. A small heap of stones, accidentally displaced, needed to be collected and added to the main heap, near the mixer. A woman went across with a headpan, a man with a spade. He filled the headpan, and the woman carried the load away, to tip it in the main heap and return. While she did so, the man waited, leaning on his spade. Then he refilled the headpan and again leaned on his spade while the woman walked away. Presently he was joined by another man, and then another. Now they all three leaned on their spades while the woman came and went, and they took it in turns to fill the headpan. Herr Stüwe endured it for exactly twenty minutes. Then something snapped. He hurtled across the site like a demon erupting from its lair, scattering stone, headpans, and spades

in the fury of his coming, while epithets in a strange mixture of his own tongue and the local tongue poured from his lips. His direction to the three men to leave the job was given in English in, as Paul afterwards told Aku, 'the clearest possible terms'.

Suddenly an electric current seemed to pass through the labourers, welding them into a massed whole. Few of them knew the cause of the disturbance, few cared. Yet immediately they were massed in fierce muttering opposition to the white man. For years the white man had ruled them, their minds cried, he was not ruling them now. This was no longer Herr Stüwe who 'have sense', no longer the youth who was giving them openhandedly of his time and skill for some idealistic vision of his own. Now he was simply and solely a white man, the representative of all white men, the summary and essence of everything that they hated and desired and feared and envied. So they were massed into a fierce, threatening whole. The women stood to one side, silent. That was good, because as long as the women remained silent, violence was under control. It was when the women began to speak, to chant, to jeer, that the men would be frenzied to action.

Judge Wenya was at Herr Stüwe's side. He said scathingly to the foreman, 'So. So well do you do your work that our adviser and guest must do it for you. These men are paid to work. If they don't work, sack them.'

The foreman looked uncomfortable. He took a step forward and a voice cried out in the rear. 'You sack them and we strike.' A mutter ran through the crowd. 'Yes, sack them and we strike.' They called it a strike, but it would end up as a riot.

This was no place for Judge Wenya. They knew him and they respected him for his learning and his integrity. But now they could not meekly retreat. To save face requires words. They must 'talk the case'. They wanted words.

It was Paul who gave them the words. He spoke from the top of a mound of stones. He spoke quietly yet his voice carried across the crowd. He said, 'Against whom will you strike? Against the employers? It is the village that employs you. So you will strike against your own village. For what will you strike? So that the work will stop? Then the reservoir will stop. There will be no water. So you will strike against the old and the sick

and the new-born. And who are these men? Strangers, not men of the village. We must tell them, we of the village, that Nyitso does not strike against the old and the sick and the new-born.' He turned to where a group of women stood staring. 'And for what will you strike? To stop the work, to stop the reservoir, to leave the good water in the deep earth, so that you and your daughters after you will walk many miles every day to carry water to your homes?' There was complete silence now. Their eyes were fixed on him. The logic was right, the words were right. His voice grew lighter. He said, 'Poor men. Poor strangers. They do not understand. We build here a reservoir, not a hospital. They come in sickness, to lean on spades, outside a hospital. Tell them we shall build later a hospital and then they can lean, and we shall send doctors to help them to stand up again. But *now*—we build a reservoir.' The last sentence was shouted out, and immediately they shouted in chorus, 'We build a reservoir. Not a hospital for leaning.' A great wave of laughter passed through their midst. He stepped down from the mound. The headmen seized their cue. In a few moments the labourers were back at their toil, the mixer clanked and slurred, and the women walked steadily in a line. He was sweating, sweating more than the heat made him sweat. Herr Stüwe had regained his usual controlled but restive composure. He said, 'I regret. I should not perhaps have interfered.' Judge Wenya murmured slowly, 'I too regret. You see, we know ourselves and our ways of life and thought. We forget that many things are strange to you, strange and irritating, sometimes appalling. You have been generous to us, yet we seem utterly thankless. But in our hearts we know these things, and we value your friendship.'

Herr Stüwe said formally, 'I appreciate your kind words. I shall now return to my work.'

He bowed and left them and Wenya said, 'He has maturity beyond his years. Our young men have not his ways.'

Paul said, 'Our young men spend their growing lives bundled up together in a family unit, a village unit, and a tribal unit. How can they ever develop to a state of real maturity?'

Herr Stüwe had his own comment to add. Paul called round at the rest house that night to find the young man strangely

haggard in the lamplight. He said, 'I hope you are not ill,' anxiously, and Herr Stüwe shook his head. He said, 'No. I am not ill. But today I realized that I am completely exhausted. They talk about noise and bustle in a European city, but for sheer, unending clamour, this village would be hard to beat. From three o'clock onward there is no rest; there is sweeping and brushing and greeting and shooing of fowls and shouting at children and clanging of church bells and blaring of radios and playing of school bands. One arrives at work already exhausted. One comes home in the afternoon and relaxes, while somebody does carpentry repairs to his house, and another attends to his corrugated iron roof.

'The men whistle, the women sing, the children shout greetings. Still the bell rings and the radios play and now there is much beating of drums. Trrm Trrm Trrm. For hours. In one house some amateur choir has practice, in another the bamboo flutes play. The buses pass. Every driver blows his horn from one end of the village to the other. And always the drums. Trrm Trrm Trrm. And your cousin teaches school here. How can pupils learn, when all about them is this vibrating noise?'

He paused and Paul said anxiously, 'Perhaps you should go away for a few days, to the capital, chat with your friends, go to a cinema'.

Herr Stüwe looked sardonic. He said, 'Yes, I am going away on Friday for the week-end. But I shall not go to the capital. I shall go into the Shai Plains where there is nothing for miles. And there I shall stay, right in the middle of the plains. I shall sleep and sleep and sleep.'

As Paul walked back down the roadway, he was accosted by two figures, Zo-kaka and Zo-piapia. The latter said anxiously, 'He is leaving us?' Paul said, 'No. I do not think so. Why do you think so?' 'Because he is going mad', said Zo-piapia sagely. 'He says to a man "Go" and the man says "Yes". Then he says again "Go" and the man says "Yes, sir, I go". Then he says again "Go" and the man says, "Yes sir, I am in the vicinity of going". Then he goes mad.' He nodded his head with great vigour. He said, 'He thinks we are not clever at the work. It was the colonialists. They never taught us anything.' Zo-kaka was not letting this pass. 'Who is this speaking? he jeered, as Seth might have done,

'I remember in the old days, a British man tried to teach you about beveling and when he hit you for your stupidity you rushed howling to the D.C. and he said the man must not hit you. So the man never hit you again. No, and the man never taught you anything again. So who was clever; and who is talking now?'

Paul left them to their wrangling. The day had provided much food for thought, and material for writing. He wrote for a long time, long past the time when the clamour that Herr Stüwe complained of died away and a midnight peace settled over the village, the peace of slumber, aided by the muffling white fogs that crept up the hillside and lay in heavy masses under the trees and round the houses. He was not easy in his mind. The young foreigner's words were correct. There was no relaxation in the village. There was toil, long hours of hard toil, and there was jubilation in the ending of toil, jubilation that expressed itself in the satisfying creation of noise, whether of car-hooter, radio, or drums. Or even of voices, so that two women seated on verandahs on opposite sides of the road would happily converse with each other echoingly across the intervening space. There was nothing private about these conversations, anybody who wished could join in. Sooner or later somebody would, and then somebody else, on another verandah. His own remark to Judge Wenya, 'Our young men spend their growing lives bundled up together in a family unit, a village unit, and a tribal unit' had sprung unbidden, to his lips. He had this experience quite often now, he noticed, as though he had a second brain tucked away inside the first, working away, observing, recording, analysing, all on its own, then, when it wished, sending messages through to the first brain. But he needed no second brain to observe and experience the prevailing tension, and that created by the growing heat was the worst of the whole year.

Irritation everywhere was increased by the water shortage. The river dropped alarmingly, more a series of pools now, so that it was difficult to scoop up water into buckets. The communal labour erected a small cement wall across the bed, with five or six pieces of pipe imbedded in and through it. Here and there they deepened the bed. This had the effect of channelling the flow of water and it dammed up slightly, behind the wall, and

poured through the pipe outlets. This was a help. A bucket placed beneath a pipe filled quickly with clear water. But long queues formed for a turn at the pipes so that each one who came, came as few times as possible. Water stood about the compounds and the courtyards in calabashes and buckets. Unconscious rationing was in force. One could not wash in water and throw that water away. It was good for two or three or four washings, from head to toe, after the day's work in the sun. To wash in stale, dirty water was an irritation in itself, but after hours in the hot sun the body craved for the feel of water. One could, like Herr Stüwe, 'go mad'. Or one could insulate the brain against madness by piling up thick layers of sullen indifference to all forms of dirt.

Even the snakes seemed affected by the madness and changed their ways, so that the little tree vipers, usually relying for safety on the camouflage of the foliage, grew unusually aggressive and several apparently vicious attacks were reported to nodding circles in the village. Possibly the reptiles were driven from their usual haunts by drying heat or leaf-fall, so that their normal prey had to be sought out more openly. Possibly the reported attacks were really self-defence against attacks by startled men. Nevertheless, the reports continued and slumbering superstitions began to awaken. The cobras, on the other hand, declined in news value. With their flickering tongues and spread hoods and the known danger of the fiercely propelled venom, they attracted to themselves many wild stories of ferocity. Yet now they appeared noticeably sluggish and easy to capture, so that the sight of travelling charmers in the market place became fairly commonplace, and the crowds gathered around, without suddenly crowding back when the strong shiny body rose swayingly from its basket, only displaying its hood if persistently provoked.

There was violence now, sudden manifestations of envy and malice erupting into violence. Constable Labi was kept busy in a way that would have astonished his eager and heroic young predecessor. The lines of footprints leading from the village to the magistrate's courts in the valley, and even the circuit court, grew deeper and broader and clearer. There was Dagarti first, fined for strangling a dog. The dog belonged to the Obeng

family, a lean hunting dog of considerable prowess in bringing down a civet or mongoose. Whenever Dagarti passed by the Obengs, it barked at him, a short sharp derisive bark ending in a contemptuous growl. Further, it seldom barked at anyone else. One day Dagarti could stand its contempt no longer. He flew wildly at the dog and strangled it with his bare hands. He was fined £6 10s. od. for the offence with strong words from the magistrate, and the village instantly split into two parties; those who felt that the fine was not enough and that most of it anyway should have been paid to the Obeng household to compensate them for the loss of the dog; those who felt it was too much, for Dagarti was but a poor man, and anyway a dog was only a dog.

But the arguments soon died away in contemplation of other misdeeds. The next case was worse. Mensah came home one day from the farmlands filled with delightful anticipation of a meal of meat that would follow, for a Fulani drover had appeared that morning in the village after quite a long interval during which no cattle had set foot in the hills. The meat was not there. It had been eaten by his young grandson who even now was sitting ruminatively chewing the last remnants in front of a fire of twigs and charcoal. In the fury of realization, Mensah snatched the last morsel of the meat from the thieving hands and thrust them down two or three times into the flames. The child's screams soon had a crowd assembled. But while some applied beaten yam to the burns, there were others who maintained adamantly that the only way to turn a potential young thief into the path of righteousness was to mete out to his initial offence a punishment of such severity that he would not be overcome by temptation again. Unfortunately for Mensah, the magistrate did not find himself altogether in harmony with this view and an even heavier fine than Dagarti's followed.

Meat remained a topic of conversation, for it was alleged that the very drover who had sold the meat to Mensah was guilty of displaying meat from a badly infected animal. Abiba Adu was one of those who made her allegations so loudly in the market place that the drover took refuge in counter-allegations in defence. Accusation after accusation flew backwards and forwards across the meat-strewn table till Abiba suddenly

snatched up the drover's own knife and managed to inflict a deep gash in the man's forearm before she was overpowered by more peaceful onlookers. Unfortunately for Constable Labi, his intervention coincided with the arrival of Abiba's sister Akua, who flew loyally to her assistance and inflicted several heavy blows on various parts of the constable's corpulent person before she in turn was overpowered. In due course both paid their fines to the court office in the valley.

The villagers grew even more thoughtful over the next case, which concerned Kwabena, charged with shooting at his brother with evil intent. It happened while they were out hunting in the forest. Kwabena, normally a quiet inoffensive person, maintained that he had mistaken his brother for an animal and fired in reaction to a sudden movement. However, certain facts emerged about the placing of the shot, and it was recalled darkly that the brothers had recently been in a state of angry rivalry over one Agnes, so while his brother languished in hospital, Kwabena was committed to jail for some months.

The sentence at least brought a feeling of relief. There were far too many fines. The villagers worked hard to accumulate money in their midst and grew irritated while doing so, and irritation ended in deeds which in turn resulted in good money being drained down into the valley courts. The whole cycle seemed a little pointless.

In an atmosphere so charged with exasperation and frustration violence could lead to murder. Soon it did.

There was a quarrel between two cousins, Tei and Adati, over money, a quarrel which started one day down in the valley and the incensed Tei actually set off up the hill to the village, with the avowed intention of seeking the intervention of no less a person than Nana Osei Adea himself. Adati followed after him and as they walked they hurled abuse backwards and forwards at each other. Adati came up with Tei in the presence of some passers-by who halted and stared in curiosity. It appeared later from their words that both cousins were carrying lamps and that Tei, in the midst of the argument, suddenly picked up Adati's lamp and poured the kerosene from it into his own lamp. Adati screamed, 'You took my money, and now you take my kerosene', and rained blows on Tei. Tei retaliated fiercely and they

rolled and shouted in the dust, punching and kicking, till Tei became still, and Adati rose slowly to his feet. Tei was unconscious. The onlookers clustered round and presently they carried Tei down to the valley, to the Health Clinic. But not long after they reached it he died.

While Nyitso was still tensely discussing this affair, it was stupefied by the next tragedy when Kwesi Agbo, rendered furious by allegations in the village about his sister's morality or lack of same, came flying home in a wild rage to find not only sullen indifference to his accusations but not a sign of preparation for a meal. Kwesi was a poor man but a member of the church choir and rather prominent in church affairs. He felt the allegations more keenly on that account. Moreover he had heard them in the private room of his friend Yaw, where clusters of men could be seen gathering privily at various times of the day, for the purpose of quaffing palm-wine. The fury and the palm-wine were the gunpowder that needed only a slight spark to set it off. The foodless table provided it. Kwesi's hand snatched for a weapon. It seized the pestle with which his old mother was drearily pounding fufu and he struck out. Whether by accident or the action of palm-wine, who could say? It was his mother who lay at his feet, felled to death.

A feeling of almost hysterical horror passed through the village. Anger, violence, murder. All these things were reprehensible. They knew that. At other times they knew it well, even if now the Harmattan seemed to have blown sense right out of their brains. But even in the midst of madness, they felt that this was a dreadful crime. To raise one's hand against the parents, to strike down the mother who had borne you. A great silence fell upon the village so that they talked in whispers as though fearful of breaking it, in little nodding groups.

To Paul the news came with the force of a physical blow. It seemed suddenly that the whole smiling, toiling village had been wiped away, leaving a grinning spectre of murder and matricide. It worried him to an extent that even surprised him. The woman rose clearly in his mind, a stooped, wrinkled old woman, rather vague in her manner and speech, for ever pounding away with that wretched pestle, pounding yam, maize, groundnuts, plantains, pounding away, and all the while

she held in her hand the instrument of her own death. Macabre thoughts crowded his mind, coming between his pen and the paper on which he wrote. Sometimes he felt a great weariness, a weariness unto death. He said to Aku, 'I am losing all faith in my people'. Aku frowned too, but he attempted soothing words. He said, 'The authorities will deal with Kwesi and he will pay the penalty for his crime. It is not for us to judge him. Besides, normally he was quite a decent man, in fact a very decent man. Why do these fools fill themselves up with fermenting liquor till they lose all sense? Besides, his sister's attitude provoked him.'

Paul growled. 'Only a man whose morals are beyond reproach is entitled to be righteously enraged about any woman's morals. Such men are few in number. That's a poor defence.'

Aku's bones seemed intensified by the lamplight as he sat, bolt upright in his chair. He said earnestly, 'Always there is trouble at this time of the year. Always. You feel so dried up and scorched and useless and thrown aside. You want to strike back at something.'

Paul cried, 'Please Aku, You strike at everything I most want to believe. If we are merely the creation of our environment, if our actions are dependent on the whim of climate, then we have no real will, no intelligence, no humanity. Still less have we any spark of divinity.'

Aku looked puzzled. He looked a little peculiar too. The prevailing hysteria had not left him completely untouched. He said, 'But you cannot ignore the effect of environment'. A strange smile flitted across his face. It was reflected in the eyes of Alale who sat motionless at the table, her eyes turning from one to the other as they spoke. Aku continued. 'Once we had a sermon from a visiting preacher and what do you think he spoke about? Saint Francis of Assisi, and how he professed kinship with all living creatures.' He was interrupted by a sound from Alale, who knew the story. She was rocking in her chair in silent mirth. She placed her elbows on the table and rested her face in her hands and rocked to and fro. The strange smile had become fixed on Aku's face now. He said, 'I was terribly impressed. I even repeated most of that sermon to the school children. I spoke about the brotherhood of all living creatures'

and how we should bear ourselves towards our brothers.' His thin frame was vibrating. He suddenly giggled, then roared with laughter. 'That very day a scorpion stung me, stung me in savage brotherliness.' Alale's laughter pelted after his. 'The scorpion stung him', she gasped, 'he nearly died.' They abandoned themselves to mirth, till Aku wiped his eyes saying, 'I was brotherly to the scorpion and he was brotherly to me. He stung me.' Alale shouted aloud, nearly setting Aku off again. 'He nearly died', she shrieked merrily, 'he nearly died.'

In spite of himself Paul began to laugh. What else could you do? All your accepted religion and attempted philosophy summed up in the sting of a scorpion. Somehow he was roaring with laughter, too, as loud as Aku and Alale combined.

That ended the discussion, but not his misgivings. In quieter moments they returned. He must keep his faith in Nyitso because it was a link in the chain of humanity. Even if it were the very weakest link, it was still a part of the chain. Without it, the chain was useless.

Through the sombre pattern, Seth's misdeeds passed like a bright thread by comparison. As Aku feared, Seth was ready to 'break out again'.

No one denied that Seth's wife was one of the hardest working young women in the village. From morning to night, she could be seen washing, ironing, sweeping, pounding, cooking, fetching water, setting off to the market place with her baby on her back, a thin little baby like its thin little mother, who glanced sideways as she walked along the roadway, a cold glance. She saw everything and everyone; she seldom spoke, she never smiled. But while no one denied Dema's virtues, their tongues lacked warmth, their voices tended to die down at her approach. It was a strange respect accorded to a strange personality. Had it not been given, it could have been extorted by her tongue which was like a whiplash. When the marriage was hastily arranged by the elders of both families, to obviate a scandal in the Christian community, quite a few of the very old women and the very old men, too, whispered that the affair in the farmlands was easily explained. Dema had bewitched Seth. The less naïve laughed contemptuously. Where women were concerned, Seth needed no bewitching. His latest surrender to

this particular form of witchcraft was given to the ample form of Asaba, who was at least ten years Dema's senior, as large and jolly as Dema was small and morose, and as loud as Dema was silent. Asaba was a small-time trader who sometimes adroitly made ventures into larger scale trading, going down to the plains and purchasing cotton, then spinning it herself into a fine thread with skilful fingers. Thereafter she proceeded to the valley side where she disposed of it in the market place to the kente weavers, who had long since recognized her skill. She had a knack of purchasing small quantities of gadgets and knowing when to dispose of them, such as the time of a good cocoa first-stage sale when money lay uneasily in hands that had not yet grown accustomed to the seasonal feel of it, and Asaba appeared in the market place with twinkling, twirling egg-beaters that were sold off rapidly to women who seldom or never beat an egg. 'Come and look', she shouted, twirling a beater in a panful of water on which she dropped a cupful of dried milk. In no time at all the milk was beautifully dissolved. There were all sorts of uses for egg-beaters other than beating eggs. Asaba always gave her audience the full benefit of her researches. Who could resist her?

She held chuckling court on the verandah of her house and her palm-wine circulated freely. She was so progressive that she had even ceased the practice of hiding her money in the ground, or the walls, or the roof, and had a banking account in the bank agency in the valley. Who could resist Asaba? Certainly not Seth. The affair progressed to the point when it was public knowledge. Nobody knew when it reached Dema's ears but everybody knew when it reached her fists. Unceremoniously she dumped her baby on the verandah, armed herself with a large bottle, and proceeded silently to the verandah of Asaba where the ferocity of her attack scattered three men and a woman, and left Asaba lying unconscious in a pool of blood, whereupon she returned silently home, armed herself with another bottle, and set out for Yaw's private room with an unerring husband-seeking instinct. Arrived there, the attack was launched as before and a number of startled men erupted from Yaw's house as the silent fury hurled itself into their midst. Now it was Seth who lay unconscious. Thereafter Dema returned home and armed her-

self with another bottle. She had tasted the joys of combat and desired more. Silent grudges now found voice in her mind. It was fortunate that Constable Labi intervened at this point, otherwise Dema might have commenced a reign of terror in the village.

This story serves to illustrate the value of impartial, impersonal justice, for had the village given a verdict it would have gone against Dema purely on grounds of unpopularity. The court's verdict admittedly also went against Dema. The presiding judge announced a fine of £15 for the assault on Asaba. But at this point Seth was called into the dock and informed that the fine was being imposed not on Dema but on him. 'If you had been content with one woman, this trouble would not have arisen', he was told severely. For a while Seth toyed with the idea of accepting the alternative sentence of three months in prison, but in the end rejected it and paid the fine. All in all, Seth's little habits were proving expensive, but this was preferable to the irksome restrictions of prison life. Co-education had appeared, but co-imprisonment had not. There were times when the country appeared very unprogressive indeed.

Aku continually cast his eyes heavenwards, muttering, 'Soon the rains will come, then Seth will be too busy in the farmlands'. Others besides Seth would be too busy for trouble too, but meanwhile they waited while the Harmattan blew and the dust-filled heat burned into explosive intensity and the violence increased. Deep in their minds lay a strong layer of superstitious fear, and times of stress, in spite of all the exhortations of Christian pastors, brought it slowly and surely to the surface. Fitting occasion to bring it into the open was provided by a mysterious tragedy that occurred. An elderly farmer failed to return home from the farmlands one night. Later on his son went seeking him and presently was joined by a few other members of the family. They sought far and wide, carrying lamps and burning torches, calling and listening. All night they searched vainly. The next day the chief was informed and big search-parties set out. It was slow work, searching through fields and the thickly grown vegetation that surrounded them, and the fern-filled caverns of the forest. It took them two days to find him, lying not far from a well-used path. The body was

headless. Another day's search revealed the head. It was a savage attack, undoubtedly the work of a madman. Mothers drew their children closer to them when they went off to the farmlands. They kept to well-defined paths. The murder was bad enough, but there was something in the thought of that poor severed head that made them glance uneasily over their shoulders.

Hence the ju-ju men in the valley thrived. Some of them even found their way to the village, scenting profitable extension of business. There were those who sold ju-jus for bringing back deserting husbands or wives; there were secret trials by ordeal to unearth a thief if anything disappeared in a crowded house when undoubtedly it was one of the occupiers. Sometimes it was necessary to lick a red-hot cutlass, which would burn only the tongue of the guilty one. Sometimes it was necessary to carry burning pots which would give out smoke only in the hands of the guilty one. One frightened youngster even reported that he had been asked to carry out a robbery in a postal agency, being promised immunity from bullets and cutlasses by the ritual of drinking ju-ju prepared with blood drawn from his finger-tips.

Superstition revived in activities other than those connected with crime. When hunters killed now they set up a wild funeral lament to appease the spirits of the animals. Even the tree-fellers killed fowls and sprinkled the blood upon the bark to appease the tree spirits.

In the midst of it all, the old stone church gazed wearily down on the faithful and the defaulters, and tolled the bell for a diminished congregation. Aku gazed often heavenwards and said, 'Soon the rains will come and their senses will return to them'. But Paul gazed at the ground and thought, 'What is the use of faith in God and human nature, if it all hangs in dependence on a shower of rain?'

He was, like the village, no longer on the crest of the wave. Not even in the trough. He was struggling in the backwash. He craved for something to buoy him up, some incident, however small and ridiculous, to relieve the strain. Life is sometimes kind. It provided him with such an incident, small and ridiculous. One evening, as he came down the road towards his house, he

met a wild and tattered figure. It was a man of some forty years, tall and lean, clad in a long torn garment that flapped forlornly in the quiet breeze. Beneath a mat of thick hair and a high forehead, there peered bright eyes. On his breast he wore a large crucifix. He raised both arms on high and called out, 'My brother. I have come to bring you peace.' Paul stopped. A crazed brain into which some notion of religion had crept. He remembered, uneasily, the headless body, but he stood his ground. He asked calmly, 'What is your name-day?', in the manner of the countryside. The man had stopped. He said ponderously, 'I am Saint Peter. I carry the keys of the kingdom of Heaven. The spirits of hell are all about you. But you shall be saved from them.' From his garments he brought forth a small bottle of water. Moistening his forefinger he proceeded to dab Paul's forehead and shoulders. He said, 'You are anointed now, my son, the powers of hell are trooping away.' Paul pondered a moment. The last thing the village needed now was a crazed prophet. He said, 'Wait', and went to his house, returning with some bread which he placed in the man's hands. He said, 'Holy One. My eyes are opened. I see the forces of hell, trooping down into the plains. You must follow them, relentlessly. Drive them into the sea.' All the while he was steadily walking through the village, the crazed one eagerly listening and walking at his side. Suddenly the prophet cried, 'My keys. Someone has taken my keys. The keys of the kingdom of heaven.' Paul said, 'The forces of hell have taken your keys. You must hurry. Overtake them before they have passed far over the plains, recover the keys and drive the forces into the sea.' The prophet broke into a run. He scurried up the series of small ridges and made his way down the farther side, loping along now at a great pace, while Paul turned homeward again, with a smile.

It was a welcome moment of relief even if it was merely a flicker of light in the darkness, because about this time Reuben's letter arrived. Reuben was growing worried. He enclosed a list of all the persons detained in Preventive Detention. It was a formidable list commencing with the name of the leader of the Opposition. The list was merely enclosed. Reuben made no comment. He wrote. 'Paul, have you forgotten my offer of a job? At present, I think you live too close to the border.' Perhaps by the border he meant the obvious one, that lay between them and the Togoland that seemed such a thorn in the flesh of the government. Perhaps he meant something less obvious, that Paul would one day step across the border into active subversion. The list itself was a silent warning. Coming on top of everything else he had a well-nigh unbearable feeling of care and depression. He even dreaded the rains for their very power to relax the tension. They would merely mock at other powers which should override matters of climate and environment. Even the crazed St. Peter's flicker of the light of amusement died in the darkness.

But at the moment when the last drop of faith seemed to have drained away, it was suddenly restored, full and brimming and sparkling with life. For the villagers rose in answer to a threatened peril, rose spontaneously, angrily, gleefully, giving of their labour and giving of their loyalty, in the most abundant of abundance.

It was the school affair, as it was ever afterwards called, and Paul was present right at the start, for it was in his house that, late one night, who should appear but the transferred Francis, neatly arrayed but rather wild of eye. His place at the school had been taken by a young lady of such charm and beauty that nobody even noticed that her teaching smacked rather woefully of inefficiency. She appeared daily, attired in cream,

which was the uniform colour for lady teachers, in a European-style dress, with a neatly pleated skirt and tiny sleeves. Her feet were in embroidered Indian sandals, and her straightened hair was swept both longitudinally and latitudinally round her head in a long continuous swathe. She sailed gracefully along the roadway, casting fluttering looks this way and that in a manner that brought crowds of the village lusties to the roadside every morning, so that she seemed to be conducting a one-woman triumphal procession, particularly as this was just the time when the school band broke into frenzied life. The band was slipping back too. Quite a few false notes and jagged rhythms were appearing since Francis's departure, but these were in part muffled by the whistles and cat-calls evoked by Miss Naomi's perambulations. There were moments when Aku would stand stock still, one hand on his hip, the other persistently patting the back of his head, while he wondered if perhaps co-education was being rather unduly rushed.

Hence Francis had no business in the village at all, least of all at that time of night. He walked in out of the darkness without even pausing to clap his hands gently together outside the open door. He said breathlessly to Paul, 'You think I am treacherous I know. You think I am sneaking and backsliding and treacherous. But I am not.' His voice rose, with a note of hysteria in it. 'I have come to warn you. Tell your cousin that the school is in danger.' With that he turned and ran down the path out into the roadway, the sound of his footsteps quickly dying away.

Paul leapt to his feet. What on earth was going on? All this talk of bombs and explosions in the capital. Had this young lunatic got carried away by some wild scheme of retaliation, and now regretted it? He roused Aku hurriedly and they set off up to the deserted classrooms standing amid the darkness of a broad grassy area. A diligent search of the classrooms revealed nothing, no bombs, no explosives, no fires. Nothing. Everything was exactly as it should be. Relieved, they returned to Aku's home. He was frowning heavily now. He said, 'You know, Paul, I have an uneasy feeling that Francis is really warning us, but not of the dangers we suspect. Only about five days ago I had a visit from Mr. Donkor, headmaster of that big government middle-school in the valley. He was quite sickening. Prowled around for

ages, looking at everything, asking questions, making remarks about church-controlled schools being a little out of line in a truly socialistic state. Do you think there is any connexion between the two visits?

Paul was frowning too. He said, 'Acts of Parliament get passed here like flashes of lightning. Maybe someone's gunning for church-controlled schools. What is your position, by the way?'

Aku patted the back of his head in the habit he had developed lately. He said, 'Our church is our own. Oh, yes, the movement was started by Swiss missionaries, but our affiliations overseas are only those of courtesy. Likewise our schools are our own. In most cases white missionaries established schools. In the case of Nyitso, when our people first fled here, there were no European missionaries with them. This school is therefore completely our own. We decide its policy, we appoint its teachers. In the colonial days, the government commenced subsidizing education by providing a salary for every qualified teacher in such schools. The present government has carried this on. There is more inspection these days, but we cannot really complain of undue interference.'

It was puzzling and it made them feel uneasy. Paul decided to institute some inquiries. But this proved unnecessary. Only two days later, Madam Rosalie pulled up her Volkswagen opposite Aku's house, with a jerk that was quite unlike her usual smooth handling of the car. When Paul saw her he hurried across, for Madam Rosalie had been on one of her periodic visits to the larger world and he felt sure she brought news. He was right. Madam Rosalie said earnestly to Aku, 'They are what they call "rationalizing" the education system. Church-controlled schools as such are not the main target, but all schools which do not reach a certain standard. Moreover, where two or three schools exist, they will be absorbed into one large school.' Aku said, 'I defy anyone to criticize the standards in my school', though he thought rather uneasily about Miss Naomi. Madam Rosalie replied, 'That is not all. There is talk of compulsory education. I do not think they have agreed on a date but when they do, all children not actually registered at that time will be "directed" into appropriate schools. In the valley rumour says that Agyeman is going to build a huge school close to the hill-

side end, and that Donkor will be the headmaster. This will absorb at least three valley schools. Then it is easy to see what will happen. Every unregistered child in Nyitso will be directed there.'

Aku looked almost grotesque with horror. He said, 'That will make it impossible for our school to expand. Then they will close it. Our children will have to spend hours getting to and from school. Our village will lose its identity.'

'And therefore its power', said Madam Rosalie. Paul looked at her sharply. It was another of those remarks which cried aloud for interpretation. Aku rose, 'I shall go and see Mr. Donkor about all this', but Madam Rosalie gave a silky laugh. 'A mouse does not peer into the cat's bag', she said. 'It may see its mother's head.' It was a remark such as Alale would have made. Aku sat down again. 'What shall we do?' he said miserably.

Madam Rosalie's eyes flickered across to Paul. He answered her look and Aku's words. He said, 'We must build our own school. We must register all our own children. We must find some more teachers quickly. We must present the government with a *fait accompli*.'

Madam Rosalie said, 'I have a nephew who is a teacher. He is just back from Europe. He has applied for a post but he will cancel the application. He will come. We must send out a message to all who have wandered away from Nyitso. All we need are two or three with a certain level of education. Such people are being used all over the country now. There are not nearly enough qualified teachers to go round. So no one will be able to attack us on that ground.' Aku stood up. It would not be incorrect to say that he glittered from head to foot. 'I shall see the Council Chairman now', he said and walked out of the house without further ceremony.

Abruptly the voice of the village changed. It grew louder and clearer and more dominant than it had ever been. If you listened very hard you could analyse it. There was the sound made by the stone-breakers as their hammers splintered large stones into small stones, there was the clamour of the concrete-mixer as it crashed with stones and swished with water and purred with sand and cement, casting it out on a platform, when the scraping of the spades could be heard. There was the agitated

stutter of the block-making machine as it seized the cement mixture and patted it swiftly into neat blocks with strong metal hands. There was the joyous cry of the tile-machine as it fashioned the long, rounded orange-red tiles. Through all these sounds, around them, below them, was the sound of feet, the slow, heavy steps of those who brought the big stones from the old quarry, the quicker steps of those who bore the concrete to the gaping foundations of the new classrooms, the careful step of those who bore water from the river to fill the big drums that stood awaiting them greedily; water in headpans, and on the surface lay clusters of palm leaves to still the movements of the water as the carriers walked. There were steady steps too, as they bore the made blocks from the company's yard to the new site, blocks intended for the petrol station. Never mind, they would be used now. Nyitso was investing its blocks and its labour in an asset, a new school-building. There was an urgency in their investing, an urgency which had gathered up the entire village as though in a mighty hand, from the moment when, in response to the crier's call, they had assembled in the open space before the church and from the steps the speakers told them of this threat to their own communal life which they knew and understood and served. The world beyond Nyitso had always been there. Not for years and years had it appeared inimical. Yet now it raised its hand to strike. They massed together instantly in a defence that was a form of striking. Those who had never made the slightest use of the school as angered as those who had used it to the full. So that their labour was given freely, and they poured it out. The enthusiasm was so contagious that even tiny children ran gleefully about, with trays on their heads, trays that they filled with sand which was tipped into little mounds, to no purpose at all, except to express a great desire to help, to join in this demonstration of oneness.

Presently a new note came in the voice, for Komla the leper was singing to his machine, as he adjusted levers and clashed locks, and all the toiling figures sang back to him. In the toil and in the singing, they gathered up together all the wildness and the tension and the forces of the time of the Harmattan, and sent them winging away, so that all that was left was the great bond of loyalty that held them after all, and in spite of all, to

each other and to their homes. They sang old songs; presently the chanting was old, but the words were new.

Our home is in Nyitso
 Our school is in Nyitso
 There it shall remain
 They shall not drag our children away
 To their fine schools in the valley
 Our children shall remain.

The communal labour built the school. Three days a week they gave their labour. So every second day the reservoir stood silent and deserted, and the valley labour stayed disgruntled in the valley. Herr Stüwe was moved to amazed protest. 'First there was the dance-floor, then the news-stall, now the school. Always some diversion from our purpose. When are we to finish the reservoir?' They soothed him anxiously and his verandah disappeared under gifts of paw-paws and oranges. For he was the acknowledged oracle on matters of construction. He contemplated his new post of architect-in-chief with some forebodings. But all went well. The Council proposed to build two wings, one at each end of, and at right angles to the existing row of three classrooms so that the result would be a letter 'H'. Herr Stüwe made deft alterations to the plan. He took two wings, moved them slightly away from the existing buildings, pulled them forward and set them at an oblique angle to the main line. He proposed to join them to the main building with a paved walk backed by a neat wall of cement blocks set in an open-work pattern. The result was an inverted 'W' with a flattened centre. The patterned walls would provide artistic relief and would also screen the six new latrines which would hover in discreet concealment, and which aroused almost as much interest as the classrooms themselves.

Paul himself was startled at the ease with which the alterations were made and the surprising change of effect. Aku was vociferous. He said, 'So clever. He changes nothing really, enlarges nothing. All he does is move them about a bit and add a couple of walls. Yet everything is different, quite different.' He stared down at the simple drawings and blinked his eyes rapidly. It seemed impossible that his simple school-block was about to

be transformed into a cluster so aesthetic, so noble. He had to give immediate expression to the joy that filled him, so he rushed across to Herr Stüwe's already overburdened verandah with half a dozen cocoanuts, rich and milky with the cool juice that wandered so deliciously down one's throat in the midst of heat and dust.

Madam Rosalie did yeoman service. She canvassed the entire village; the full support of the parents was essential. She talked with them all, those who had children at school, those who had not. The spirit of oneness was to be captured, now, instantly, and cemented into position. So she went from the comfortable homes to the not-so-comfortable, sitting cosily in mud-walled huts with awed women who, even those that knew her well from the Women's Council, regarded her as something set apart and moving in an unattainable world. By the time she finished she had a complete survey of the village in her hands. To some she spoke in terms of progress and development, to other in terms of fish and yams. To others again she dropped dark hints of proposed government fines for recalcitrants.

Alale's method was less arduous. She simply gathered at her home a small band of school-children carefully selected for the plan and said to them, 'Each one of you return here tomorrow with a child who does not yet attend school'. On their arrival she unearthed from each child its name and to what household it belonged. The process was repeated daily till her list and Madam Rosalie's could be compared, and blank spaces duly filled in. Thus the attack was launched on parents and children simultaneously. It was surprisingly successful, so successful that Aku continually cried out, 'But why didn't we do this before?' To which Alale the ever-ready replied, 'The trees were thinking. But now the shrubs are thinking too.' Aku did not squander his energy in any retort. He needed it all for the intensive teacher-training programme that was being conducted in his home. Ephraim Wenya had duly arrived in response to his grandfather's call, and three young aspirants to the teaching profession were selected for the three-week course. It was almost a race as to which would be ready first, the bewildered pupil-teachers or the rising building.

Aku said, 'The main thing is to get started. Then we apply

for a qualified teacher and at the same time we apply for one of our staff here to be trained properly at the training college. When he or she returns we send another off. And so on. We might even inveigle some of the Peace Corps here.' He suddenly began to shake with laughter. 'As far as I am concerned, they can drop postcards all over the village, all over the whole village.'

Meanwhile nobody was quite sure how the salaries of the new pupil-teachers were to be paid, but the matter was placed completely in Judge Weny'a hands. He would go to the capital and see somebody and everything would turn out all right. Which is exactly what happened. Because a surprised Education Department can hardly be uncooperative when a village suddenly heeds the oft-repeated complaints and spontaneously provides itself with a school not only built, but staffed, and—even more amazing—pupilled.

It was young Weny'a who had the streak of brilliance, but Aku the streak of fearlessness. Weny'a's idea was a gala opening day, completely unconnected with the opening day of term—this time arbitrarily chosen—and well in advance of it. As he put it, 'Dig the school uniforms out of the parents of the new pupils while the enthusiasm is at its peak. Then we have an official opening, with speeches and the band and refreshments, you know "Bring some. Eat some". All the children lined up in their uniforms, each on public display as a school-goer. How can the parents backslide after that, particularly if we do a little groundwork on the kids beforehand, let them provide some singing for instance. I mean, they're a part of the school before it is even operating.'

As Aku said to Paul, 'These Wenyas are born psychologists, the whole family'. He seemed rather absent-minded that evening. A little later he said, 'Paul, I have said it before and I say it again. I am a patriotic person and I am a conscientious teacher. I work hard for my people. I have never engaged in what are called subversive activities. Yet I do not see the need for wild emotional devotion to political leaders. Francis kept always a picture pinned in his desk. It was of a statue with the words, "Seek ye first the political kingdom and all other things shall be added unto it". That was one of the things we argued

about. I said one should render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. Then he said that religion was the hemp of the people. I said, "There is hemp and hemp. And are you so much cleverer than I that you can tell me which of these hemps is the best for me?"'

So the fearlessness was Aku's. The opening day was held just as young Wenya had suggested and all the school-children, new and old, in school uniforms, new and old, stood massed before the new building. They sang songs in honour of the occasion and all the parents looked proud, even those who still had lurking doubts about the true value of all this school-going. There were eloquent speeches, particularly the one of welcome to a representative from the Education Department, who, in turn, declared the school well and truly open. He drew aside graceful folds of cloth symbolically covering the main door, which was actually the centre door of the old block, painted up brightly, and revealed above it a scroll-work in stone with the words, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of Heaven and all other things shall be added unto you'. Aku beamed unblinkingly on his distinguished visitor and asked genially, 'Do you like our choice of inscription?' The visitor made no reply at all. Perhaps he was ashamed to say 'No'. Perhaps he was afraid to say 'Yes'.

In these days Paul felt a great peace and a great confidence. The village had redeemed itself. The badness and the madness would return. The rains would come with their burden, the dries with theirs. The Harmattan, time and again, would draw up in burning fingers the threads of living, drawing them up thinly to snapping point. All these things had brought and would perhaps ever bring a powerful influence to bear upon the minds and lives of the people of Nyitso. Yet the power was limited, the influence limited. When the time came they would rise above environment, above the whims of climate. The relief of madness was not entirely dependent on a shower of rain. At times he felt almost jubilant, carefree as in the early days before he had begun to think about such things at all.

In the excitement of school building, his own affairs drifted into the background. Now they came forward again, but more diffidently than before. Reuben's letter was still there, but it could be ignored for a while. Far more important was Aku's

fearlessness. Aku was undoubtedly cocking an eye on a martyr's crown. He grinned to himself. The thought seemed devoid of seriousness. He sometimes amused himself picturing Aku in some such crown, some heavenly garment, crying out to him, 'Here I am, Paul. I succeeded. So easy it was. Why didn't I think of it before?' Then he frowned. Aku was fearless. But others were merciless. He would rather see Aku reach his heavenly kingdom by way of old age. Aku was fearless and so was Nyitso. In stupidity and badness yet they preferred to keep their own hands on their own destiny, yet they rejoiced at the deft foiling of inimical plans, yet they pitted their toil and their loyalty against powerful interference.

All these things became reasons why he should be fearless too, why he should stay here, make his place here, defy the inimical forces. He had already made his place here. He had only to look round him to see that. The village boasted quite a few little notice-boards now, each bearing the proud words 'Self-Help Project'. There was the school, the two new wings under the orange-red tiles of roofs that were pitched correctly. Admittedly the middle part was still dolorous in an elderly garment of palm thatch, but one day that would be altered too. There was the reservoir, where once again work was in full swing, till as Herr Stüwe bitterly remarked, 'The next crazy scheme starts'. There was the restaurant with its shining dance-floor, hired out for fortnightly dances for months ahead to the Gin-and-Cocoa Club from the plains. Oddly enough the dance-floor had given rise to a new, or rather a reborn old, activity, the dramatic performance. A raised wooden platform placed centrally served as stage and on the concrete space surrounding it was grouped the audience on mats. The new young pupil-teachers, with their new young ideas, arranged the first performance, then somehow long slumbering memories stirred and awakened, and old illiterate people came forward naturally and took their place in the centre stage, pacing out and talking out ancient half-forgotten legends. Whether by design or accident, it was the trick of the stage-placing that conjured up old magic out of new. For drama lay in their history, in the days when the big, composite home, grouped round a central courtyard was more truly a fortress against invaders. The

warfare died but the house form lived, and in peaceful times the story-tellers would come to the village, to the big house of the bigman, and take up their stand in the courtyard, while all around on the verandahs clustered all the people of the place. The chief story-teller would raise his arms on high with his long garments draped about him, crying out, 'Hear ye a fable', and the crowds would say in return, 'Let the fable unfold'.

Then he would commence, 'This is a tale of Efua who sold her black goat in the market', so that they would know what the story was about, 'It is a sad story' (or a happy, or a serious, or a comical) so that they could properly compose their features. 'It took place upon a Friday afternoon.' This was important. The one fixed definite aspect of a story was its central moment of time. All else was fluid. Immediately someone would say, 'Why did she sell the black goat?' And someone else would say, 'Tell us rather of him that bought it', while yet a third would say, 'No. No. Do not bother us with these details. Tell us, instead, all about the market place and all the people there.' Then, as the questions and requests came, the story-tellers would endeavour to answer and meet them and would move about the courtyard describing the events and talking backwards and forwards to each other and sometimes to the members of the audience till three or four episodes might be enacted simultaneously about quite varied matters, only held together by the thread that it was a Friday afternoon around which everything centred. Sometimes the audience would grow so enthusiastic that three or four people would move from the verandah into the courtyard too and join the story-tellers and help to enact *their* versions of the story. Quite often they took part without moving at all, for the story-teller would say, 'The chief announced that he should be led away, but all the people assembled cried "No", when immediately all the enthralled ones on the verandah would shout out in a great voice, 'No. No.'

Presently the tale would end, as all tales must, and then the story-tellers would compliment the audience, 'Your ears are well-rounded', and the audience would greet the players in return, 'Your mouths are well salted'.

So now in Nyitso the old custom began to revive. The young ones gave tales from their hopes, the old ones from their

memories. They spoke of power outwitted by guile, and of simplicity defending itself, while cunning lay caught in its own trap.

Yes, all these things were perhaps reasons why Paul should remain. And another too. Village finance, yes, particularly village finance. For to sort out how much of that bank loan had gone into the reservoir, and how much into the dance-floor, and how much into the news-stall and how much into the school, and how much into Komla's surplus blocks which might be sold elsewhere, and how much had been recovered by the dance-floor, and how much could be expected to be recovered, and whether what Reuben had paid for the news-stall should be given back in its entirety to the central fund, or whether some of it should be regarded as a separate fund altogether, for surely the building of it had actually cost less than Reuben had paid, and whether the tiles for the school came out of the bank loan, or out of the Village Roofing Fund and, whatever was the answer, how did one actually separate their cost from the cost of the tiles used by such of the villagers as had already borrowed from the Roofing Fund, and if the profits on the building of the news-stall should be used to increase the rate of interest payable to those who loaned to the Roofing Fund or whether all profits should go to the Village Development Fund, while merely paying interest to the bank in due course, or whether it would be better to repay the bank soon and therefore have the income from the water, when the reservoir was finished, available for the Development Fund, to repeat, to sort out all these things would require much time and patience, not to mention a touch of daring here and there. He and Judge Wenya spent a whole morning in the site office, till the latter cried out, 'I've always been told that one can do anything with figures. I'd like to have the originator of that opinion right here, in this office, now.' Then he said, 'Another twenty-four hours cannot make any difference at all. Come to my house tonight for the evening meal. I shall invite Herr Stüwe too. Let us talk about lighter matters for a change.' The poor man looked quite distraught.

The dinner was enjoyable and so was the conversation that followed. It marked, so to speak, the beginning of a new era of

confidence and planning, and for Paul the ending of certain feelings of distrust. Madam Rosalie's silkiness never gave way to excitement, but tonight it approached it more nearly than it ever had before. She said, 'We shall probably get that petrol station after all. There is another company coming, an Italian company. Apparently they have some agreement with the government that they will be allowed to build petrol stations at points throughout the country. Their representatives were very interested in the idea of having one here on the pass and they will be coming to see for themselves. They couldn't come at a better time, when everything looks so busy and developing. They will use our blocks for building and then we can think about that breakdown service again. One good cocoa crop, increasing profits from all our enterprises, and I can see my day-nursery growing up before my eyes.' Whereat Herr Stüwe gave a melancholy sigh, and said, 'This will be wonderful, of course. But please, let us this time finish the reservoir.' Paul said curiously, 'I know little of this day-nursery idea. What are its objects?'

Madam Rosalie paused for a moment and obviously marshalled her facts before replying. She said at length. 'First there is the immediate object. Caring for the younger children removes one chore from the household. The mothers, particularly the poorer ones who spend most of their time in the farm-lands, cannot work and care for babies at the same time. The children lie about on cloths, sometimes on damp ground, sometimes in disease-thick dust. Perhaps they are looked after by the older children—one reason for keeping such children out of school. To sum it up, the idea of divided labour, of specialized labour, has not yet penetrated the minds of the average household. One trained person can take charge of numbers of small children, thus releasing numbers of unskilled guardians for other tasks, perhaps even for a little leisure. That idea has made even less progress in penetrating people's minds. The second object of the scheme is to catch the babies while they are young, teach them clean habits, appreciation of pleasant surroundings. We hope they will develop attitudes which will influence the parental homes. So we are actually reversing the usual education process, but under our circum-

stances it seems worth trying.'

Herr Stüwe listened politely, but he had little inclination towards long speeches himself. So now he said with an air of profundity, 'The women in this country work very hard indeed'.

Paul answered him without being aware of giving thought to the remark. It was as though that second brain, which was so busy lately, had been awaiting a suitable opportunity for a speech of its own and now took advantage of the opening. He nodded. 'Yes', he said, 'they do—very hard, much harder and far more pointlessly than the women of Europe, even the peasant women. So truly in Europe you hear talk of the emancipation of women. Yet it seems to me curious that you never hear talk of the emancipation of men.' In answer to Herr Stüwe's rather startled look, he continued slowly. 'I speak more of England than Europe as a whole, because I know England fairly well. Take a boy in England. Right from birth he regards it as his inalienable right that he should be fed, sheltered, clothed and schooled by loving parents. Discipline is so mild as to be practically non-existent, and hours of leisure and sport are also a sort of God-given right. For his mother, whom he sometimes loves, he may condescend to do one or two small chores, wash dishes occasionally, or clean shoes. For his father, whom he sometimes despises, he does nothing at all. Then he must have free choice of career. In this he consults his own inclinations, his own talents. It is terribly important to him that he must not find the work too onerous or too boring. If society does not immediately and completely fall in with his needs and desires he becomes an "angry young man"—oh rightly so. Everybody acquiesces in this view. Then he says, 'I shall marry so-and-so'. His family have nothing at all to say about that. Suppose they did. Suppose his father said, 'My son, this girl is not altogether desirable, her family connexions are even less desirable'. Suppose that it were true. He would simply say, 'Father, I love her'. And that would be that. Again nothing must interfere with his personal wishes. Then suppose his brother died and left a widow and children. He would say, 'That's none of my business. She can get a job, can't she?' Oh, it must be wonderful for men to have this freedom.'

He ended on a raised tone, slightly affected, so that Judge

Wenya suddenly chuckled happily.

Herr Stüwe said stolidly, 'Well, what is the picture here?' Paul said, 'Here there is no such thing as an individual. We move, eat, sleep, work, in groups. My cousin could tell you of three very promising pupils he had. He could do nothing about them because each one's circumstances required that he devote himself completely, as soon as possible, to the farmlands, for the maintenance of a communal household. In one case the boy had two brothers, one crippled, one crazy. Therefore his "career" had to be one which provided maximum security for his brothers. In another case there was a predominance of elderly people including one old grandmother who lived on to an estimated 105 years. In the third case there was a predominance of tiny children. Two young women in the household died in childbirth. Hence their hands were urgently needed to grow food for the remaining members of the household. In time each of them will marry, he will marry a girl whose family has advantages to balance against his own family's deficiencies. The girl's family will have a similar outlook. So—we have attained quite a degree of security, but sometimes I wonder if the price we have paid is not too heavy. So you see I find myself the champion of emancipation, of women and of men too. Not that our government desires this—they merely want to remove the family unit in which each member is a cog in a wheel, and substitute a national unit in which each member is still a cog in a wheel. Emancipation, in some contexts, can simply mean the production of more literate cogs.'

Judge Wenya chuckled again. He said, 'I think Nyitso is too confining. We should send you forth as our unofficial ambassador to work from the outside to tear down the walls that confine our minds. If you can arrange a neat piping system too, whereby a steady trickle of financial enterprise comes in to refresh us that would be excellent.'

He laughed aloud, so did Madam Rosalie. Herr Stüwe echoed the laugh, but he had a thoughtful look in his eyes, as though he were considering a set of unfamiliar thoughts.

Paul said, 'What would you do if the government suddenly took an interest in our little Nyitsian schemes, decided we were growing too capitalistic, wanted to take them over, perhaps

close them down. It has happened elsewhere.'

Wenya looked at him steadily in the lamplight. He said, 'I should open a party office here and make every villager a party member. Most of them would have very little idea of what it was all about. But it would look excellent on paper. That would guarantee our immunity. We might even one day have a representative in Parliament, returned unopposed of course. We should naturally have to select such a representative very carefully, very carefully indeed. He would need a heart that beat loyally for us, and a face wreathed in Marxian smiles.'

Paul felt he knew now the subtlety that had made Wenya a successful lawyer, and a judge who kept his standing and influence under both past foreign rulers and present indigenous ones. He said, 'So you agree that we should provide opportunities for individual talent?'

Wenya nodded. 'In theory, yes. But in practice how does one set about it? To me it seems that when hands begin to know the feel of money, then backs begin to straighten from unorganized toil, and then minds begin to know the meaning of curiosity. If money is the root of evil, it may also be the root of good. Moreover, it may be fine to pick out promising scholars and send them traipsing off, to the ends of the earth, to acquire degrees from Washington to Moscow, but we can, in giving them freedom, give them barrenness too. They lose all contact with their fellows, learn to despise them, often exploit them. Already we are notorious for corruption in public offices. I would prefer to work as we are working; get enterprises going, stir up all the old mass of ideas, put money in their hands. And I think we should exploit to the full, I use the word in its best sense, the village virtues, hard work, loyalty, oneness, mutual generosity. In the course of time, the promising ones will rise up naturally of their own accord and stretch out their hands further and open their eyes wider than their fellows.'

For the first time, Paul had a feeling that beneath his feet was solid ground, and for the first time, too, he trusted the Wenyas, completely. As he relaxed, the habit he had developed at Aku's house of letting his mind wander while others talked and argued, returned to him now. The village was in good hands, hands like Wenya's and Aku's for instance. They were closer

to their origins than he was. In his way, he was almost as much a foreigner as Herr Stüwe. He had not given the village anything. Rather had he stirred up forces that were already there. There was no dissatisfaction in the thought. Rather the opposite. Perhaps his real place was outside after all. All the good reasons for staying were also, he noted now to his surprise, equally good reasons for going. He had performed his task, set things moving. Now it was up to the peculiar genius of Nyitso to see that they continued to move without him. If they relied too much upon his presence they were not genuine.

He glanced about him at the house and its furniture. It was far and away better than some of the houses of Nyitso yet there was no sign of ostentation or squandering of unaccustomed wealth such as one saw so frequently in the capital. Apart from some bizarre touches of ornamentation, some woven mats, a couple of wawa stools, this could be a middle-class home in a pleasant English suburb.

His musings continued after he left the Wenya household, after the goodnights were wished, after he was back in his own small house, a house a little bare-looking after the one he had just left.

There was the job. He would like to work for that news-agency. It could give him scope, he could give it shape. It was needed, to guide in a trickle of truth alongside the trickle of financial enterprise that Wenya suggested. There was much talk in the capital of a similar service, to be organized there and from there. What would that mean? A steady stream of irresponsible propaganda? Counter-action was needed. He was looking forward to becoming a part of the counter-action. Various schemes rose in his mind.

But somehow, the time was still not ripe for going. There were certain matters that needed to be sorted out, such as the vexed question of village finances; there were little triumphs to be enjoyed, such as the increasing sales of tiles as the dry season approached its end. But beyond all this was a sense of approaching change, approaching event. As though that mysterious second brain were saying to him. 'You may have finished tidying up Nyitso. But Nyitso has not yet finished tidying up you.' The conviction, the intuition, grew with the days, so that

once or twice he even caught himself standing in silence, listening, as though this last event might give a sigh of warning before it came. He laughed uneasily at himself. Perhaps he was a little mad too. It was excusable. Anything was excusable in the Harmattan. The days grew hotter and hotter. The nights grew colder and colder. Clammy blankets of fog by night, burning clouds of dust by day. Perhaps he was a little mad. Premonitions change the perspective. Unimportant things appear even less important than before. Alale's little remarks for instance. Her presence was always soothing. He watched her now as she sat in the courtyard, making a new kapok mattress, the cover a good piece of linen. The cover was sewn and ready and the kapok was alongside within easy reach so that she could seize great handfuls of it and thrust it down into the corners and along the bottom seam. Then came the turn of the linen buttons, each pair placed neatly opposite each other on the opposing sides of the now-bulging cover, with thread passing right through from one to the other, holding in position the kapok and giving firmness to the whole mattress.

Alale said, 'Madam Rosalie is a nice woman, very clever and good-looking and always so nicely dressed. Her husband was a lucky man I think.'

'Yes indeed,' agreed Paul lazily.

'She works hard for the village', Alale continued. 'Some women in her place would not bother. But she does. Yes, she is a nice widow, I think.'

The introduction of the word caught Paul's ear. He said, 'Now Alale. What is going on in your head?'

Alale smiled. She took another great handful of the kapok and thrust it down into the mattress. She said, 'Well, Paul, it would be nice if you were to marry and settle down here, and everything going ahead so nicely. Of course, with your background you could not marry a village girl. But Madam Rosalie is different. You two understand each other in a way that we do not understand either of you. You have both been in strange countries. It would be quite easy. Aku would consult the judge.'

Paul sat up straight in alarm. He said, 'Alale, I do not require any elders to arrange a marriage for me—nor will I permit it. I am emancipated, Alale.'

She looked both puzzled and amused. She gestured with both her hands as though throwing the whole subject away. Then she said. 'She is a nice widow. She has plenty of money. That would be a nice change, eh?'

'Yes', said Paul. 'On the other hand it might merely be progress.'

Alale laughed with delight at being caught up in the trap of her own words. She said no more.

❖ 16 ❖

There was still to be settled the question of Small Grandfather, as Togbe's name meant. An impartial observer might have thought it odd that Paul, with his freedom from the heavy burden of the family responsibilities he deplored in the case of others, should of his own accord undertake responsibilities closely resembling family ties. For thus he merely arrived at the same end by a different route. But perhaps he was right too. The route may possibly be more important than the end. Not that his own inconsistency struck him.

By this time he had quite a quantity of descriptive literature about deaf and dumb institutes abroad. Inquiry had elicited the information that an institution existed in the capital, near the massive bulk of the old Christiansborg Castle. Yet somehow he gave it little consideration. Was it because he was hoping that medical assistance might still work wonders? Or was it because he knew that he himself would be abroad and would prefer to have Togbe nearer to his eyes? His mind was turning more and more to that outside world, while his hands strove to bring the various projects he had started to a state when they could safely be entrusted to others. And all the time the second brain waited, waited for the sign. This time it would not be a barrier falling across his path. It would be the raising of the barrier, a sign that his task here was finished and he could go, go on to those wider matters. Once or twice in the still hours, when he sat writing, he felt a shiver of apprehension. To pass the barrier one paid a toll, a toll of disappointment, of sorrow, of suffering. Perhaps that second brain was more sensitive than the first. Perhaps it was merely the heat-weariness that tinged all hope with tired despair.

Togbe was unaware of anything outside his own immediate experience. He was employed now, on the reservoir site; he

greased the machines and fetched oil-cans, and helped with running repairs, for his tiny fingers would reach where a man's stopped clumsily. He was beginning to help with the marking of the time sheets, and the older men and women stopped their work to stare and wonder at this deaf and dumb child who was outstripping them in the mystique of literacy.

Not that Togbe was more than normally intelligent. He struggled desperately, and sometimes vainly, against the twin disadvantages of his silent world and his hitherto complete lack of formal training. Yet his achievements, to the unsophisticated of Nyitso, looked quite miraculous. He had his midday meal with Paul, a good meal, and after work ended he went to Paul's house where the bathroom consisted of a square enclosure of bamboo fence with thatched roof. Here he would soap himself from head to foot with a great sponge made of the loupah fruit and a bar of local palm soap, washing it all off in a bucket of water that stood at his side. When the rains came and water was more abundant, Paul decided he would take Togbe to Aku's house and instruct him in the use of modern bathroom equipment. He would arrive in civilization equipped at least with some of the tricks, which was more than could be said for some others of his countrymen.

Togbe worked in a pair of little tattered trousers, but after his bath he attired himself in a gaudy shirt and a pair of neat trousers, the fruits of Ama's toil in the valley. Then came the lesson. After some thought Paul decided to work in English. If he was to open Togbe's world, it would be more profitable to use an international key. Moreover as he knew no tongue at all, this one would not be foreign to him. His method was simple. He prepared blocks with the letters of the alphabet painted on them, and innumerable pictures of objects. The first word Togbe ever learned was 'cat' and he never forgot the magic of it. Even when he had progressed to simple phrases he would sometimes stop, eagerly place the three required letters under the picture of a large staring cat, and then point to his own cat with a smile of excited happiness. Progress was slow, but Paul did not worry. By the time he had conquered a written vocabulary relating to simple objects and simple needs, he would be in the hands of better teachers.

After the lesson, Togbe trotted home, keeping carefully to the verge of the roadway. At the turn into the bush path he would turn and wave back to Paul who waited patiently every evening for this ritual to be observed. Then he would trot on his way eagerly, to the house where the three little ones had begun to look at him with eyes of awe. Surely he was a grown man now, for he brought money to the house, every week, a handful of coins which turned magically into dishes of smoked fish and now and then a small piece of goat meat cooked up with yam into a stew, so that the smell would draw them around the cooking-pot in mesmerized, anticipatory pleasure. There was more than Togbe's handful of coins. There were those the mother earned by dyeing cloth or weaving mats. And sometimes too came a letter from Ama in the city, a short page of brief sentences with a slip of paper that could be exchanged at the postal agency for money. Little Mother was illiterate yet she quickly knew the value of a postal order and she would present it to the postal agent, Lagbo, across the polished counter under the brass grille, standing tense and quivering and ready to break into violent outcry if there was any attempt to defraud her of any portion of the money represented by the slip of paper. Lagbo did not attempt to defraud her. Perhaps he was an honest man; perhaps he saw the look in Little Mother's eye.

Then she would carefully select one of the coins and place it meaningfully on the letter-reader's desk and he would gaze at it for a while, sometimes finger it as though wounded that anybody could rate his services so low. But he knew that Little Mother would rather leave the letter unread than add another coin to the first one. After all, it wasn't much of a letter she brought, just a short page of brief sentences. So he would sigh eventually, pocket the money, and read the letter while Little Mother who had stood expressionless and immobile through all the letter-reader's dumb show of bargaining, remained expressionless, only her hands moving occasionally as though to comment on some point in the letter.

Little Mother was still thin and still often afflicted with fever; the Elder Father still lay on the mattress of leaves and coir, and dozed and wakened and dozed again, murmuring as he dozed. But the three little ones were growing fatter and rounder

and shinier and noisier on a new diet, a diet of Togbe's coins and Ama's slips of paper with the post office stamp.

Paul heard no word of Ama for a long time. It was as though she had blown right out of the village the very first day of the Harmattan, and Nyitso seemed to have risen up in loud clamour ever since, demanding all his time and attention. Yet Ama had her own place in his mind, so that sometimes when Togbe pattered into the kitchen he would glance up, half-expecting her to be at the boy's side. Sometimes he thought about her consciously, half-worried about her welfare in the capital, half-irritated by her apparent lack of interest in himself. After all, she could read and write. It wouldn't be much effort to send him a line or two. Sometimes his subconscious mind, that wretchedly active second brain, would suddenly present her to him, standing by the gate saying timidly but accusingly, 'You frightened my brother', or singing sadly as she tied the fence of bamboo,

'The beast of death has taken my dear father,
The beast of death has taken my dear mother,
What hunters can I call, what hunters can I call?'

or dancing up and down the roadway, in the dawn light, clapping her hands, crying 'I can do that', the long golden earrings dancing with her.

This last vision was so clear that he half expected her to materialize on the roadway, in the dawn light, where he often sat on the grassy bank and watched the darkness slowly drain from the sky. He would hear the sounds of the wood chopping, and maize and rice being shaken up in wire trays. Then the aubade of sheep and goats and fowls, hushed into startled silence by the clear voice of the bell. Once or twice he strolled up to the church, and took his place amidst the robed anonymous figures in the cool darkness, where the tall unglazed window spaces formed patches of lighter darkness, and the wooden benches were long lines of darker darkness, and the murmuring voices died away into the corners or high up into the roof. There was only one light, a tiny flickering light from a hurricane lamp placed over the glowing timber of the Prayer Reader's desk.

But generally he stayed where he was, on the grassy bank, while the villagers answered the call of the bell and left Nyitso muttering with the first voices of the birds, the long sustained notes of the coucals as they flew clumsily amid the half-leaved branches, the loud sharp cries of the woodpeckers. The woodpeckers were nesting, and noisily defiant of intruders. The smaller daintier birds seemed to have vanished away. Once a small troop of lively white-bearded monkeys gazed down at him with interest, chattering animatedly to each other for a moment till they swung off into more secure retreats high up in the trees of the thicker portions of the forest. He reflected that they would move on again, even from there when they heard the sound of the concrete-mixer pursuing them through the trees. Once he sat very still and watched a beautiful little orange-head squirrel cautiously make its way down a tree. For a moment it sat still too and regarded him, its tail, orange-coloured like the head, curved up alertly. Then it moved on softly on its way, disappearing behind the tree trunks.

He heard no word from Ama, so one Sunday when the village seemed quiet after the work of the week in the great heat, he made his way to Ama's house; down the roadway where now lay a thick layer of ever-shifting red dust, a layer that spread itself over the shrubs and trees lining the road, to the place where the bush path began; along this with the tired dry grass snapping away from him as he walked. Somewhere in the distance he could hear the talking drums, muttering persistent voices.

It was a small drab house, L-shaped with a low wall completing the rectangle and thus enclosing a little yard. The walls were of mud brick built into a timber frame and the palm-leaf thatch looked poor and dry in the strong light. The yard was swept clean and bare and it boasted a small, beehive oven, under a roof of thatch. Togbe ran out to meet him, excited yet abashed by the arrival of this visitor, and the three little ones clustered into a group for mutual support and gazed at him wide-eyed. They were freshly washed, wearing their Sabbath garb of clean, rather shapeless little tunics. Two were boys. The middle one was a girl. Her ear-lobes were pierced by two tiny yellow circlets. The mother came to the door, puzzled and deferential. She moved as

Ama moved, the thin form lightly swaying the long graceful skirt. Her face relaxed from tension and fell into tired lines.

They exchanged greetings slowly and courteously and Paul followed her into the smaller of the two sides of the house, a room furnished only with a low table and several carved stools. In the other portion were the sleeping-quarters, a mattress for the sick or the aged, and rolled-up sleeping-mats for the others. He knew this without seeing, knew the endless round of hoeing, reaping and winnowing that fed the household; the endless journeys to the stand pump that gave it water for drinking and for cleanliness; the endless hours of weaving or dyeing that gave it coins for clothing and smoked fish. This woman bore the entire burden. Few would have tried. Little wonder that his people had exchanged their birthright of individual, mental growth for the material security of joint households. Yet surely it was unnecessary. A little thought, a little organization. All could be changed. Though by whom? Not by this woman. She had no time for thought. That was a task for people like himself. He remembered clearly the feelings with which he approached the village the evening of his return, the reluctance, the impatience, almost contempt. Surely he was exonerated now. The growing reservoir, the thriving restaurant, even the school, the road, the buses. In some measure he was responsible for the changing order. Yet all these things would not help this woman, could not give her back the years lost in toil, want, and toil again. As he thought of her he felt a glow of pity, for her and for the old man, and for all like them, a great glow that seemed to warm him throughout his body and mind, so that memories of what he had once called patriotism—loud political wrangling, outsmarting of foreign opponents, brash assertions of equality—all these looked cheap, begrimed, and threadbare.

The thoughts coursed through his mind as the woman brought him a gourd of juice, the cool juice of cocoanuts with the tartness of limes. So that when he spoke it was of the old man that he spoke. He said, 'The Elder Father is in great sickness'. The woman nodded. She said, 'He will live only a few more weeks. This I know for I have seen it happen often, to others. Now he lies quietly in the dry heat, and dreams. But soon the rains will come, the great rains. There will be no peace for him. The

rains will bring the fever and when the fever enters him he will die. His strength has gone now.'

She spoke quietly, mechanically. It was an inevitable sequence. Little point in setting oneself against it. Then she said, 'It is bad to die when all are not here. It is not fitting. Before the rains the daughter should come home again. The others can come easily from the valley. When there are many of us to bury him, so he will sleep more easily. The daughter should come before the rains.'

He asked, 'You have had word from her?'

'Oh yes', she hurried out and returned with three letters in her hand, brief little letters of short sentences, composed carefully so that no misunderstanding could arise for the illiterate recipient. Ama was well, she was happy in the home of her cousin, she had a job working as seamstress for a shop that sold cloths and clothing. She enclosed some money. She greeted her family. That was the information the letters conveyed, brief letters, empty of real news, empty of contact, yet somehow she was standing here in the room triumphantly returning home with Paul's roasted duck.

He said, 'You must write to her to return before the rains'. Unexpectedly she said now. 'Please, you are able to read and write. You write to her. I can speak only with the mind of the letter-writer, but you can speak with your own mind.'

He said, 'Yes' to that and took his leave. The children were still awed, but less shy now. They stood by the verandah wall and waved and smiled as he left. Presently, before the hut would be out of view, he turned and waved again. The three figures were still clustered together, with Togbe behind them. They all waved, boldly now that he was at a safe distance, and called out farewells. Behind them rose the mud-coloured house, then a group of palm trees, then the rise of a small peak in the range, clothed with tall trees, magnificent trees. Again he felt a glow of pity. They looked so very small by comparison.

He wrote a letter to Ama, a more difficult task than he expected. There were false starts and tearings up and crossings out till he groaned to himself, 'Ah, Paul, you are indeed a clever writer. Some of your columns earned you many guineas. Now you cannot write half a page to a girl who has been educated by

one course at Cousin Aku's school.' Finally he wrote, 'Dear Ama, I have visited your family and they send you greetings. The house and the hearts are empty without you. The Elder Father is in great sickness and will surely die soon. Come home before the rains come. Your friend Paul.' And he added aloud, 'Yes. Come home, Ama. Because I cannot leave Nyitso till you do', although quite what he planned he didn't know, or seek to know. Just that she should come home.

PART 6



The Time of Fulfilment

Now the great heat reached the peak of ferocity, so that the green hillsides were hidden by quivering haze but the arrogance of red earth was released to stare up into the sky, where the sun performed a devil dance in exultation. There was a cessation of planning, a cessation of toil, a cessation even of the crimes that the heat had first engendered. The leaf fall had ceased, the trees had cast down their flowers. The burned farmlands lay empty, movements of the hot air lifting the black flecks that still remained to tell of the burning. The nights grew warm now and tense under moonlight that mocked.

But under the great heat was a slight stirring, not so much a coolness as the promise of coolness, so that at sunset the squirrels would pause for a moment and sit up on haunches, raising their inquiring noses to the east and to the south, as if seeking the coming rain. On either side of the roadway under the vegetation with its mantle of dust, appeared the Resurrection lilies, group after group, tiny mauve bugles blowing an inaudible fanfare for the rains.

The small singing birds returned to Nyitso from their hiding-places of the time of the great heat. The dawn brought again the merry message of the bulbul, the evenings the liquid music of the shrikes. The noisy weavers were jabbering again in the palm trees, flashes of gold darting from tree to tree. On the ground the egg-eating snakes lay still and marked the nesting-places of the weavers with interested eyes.

Slowly, inexorably, the south winds grew in power, turning back the invaders from the north who had ruled for too long. Then it was their turn, their time, the time of the rains, the time of the tornadoes. The coolness of dawn was transformed into the heat of noon and then fell a great calm over the earth, the trees were motionless in the air, the birdsong stilled. The fury

creatures of the undergrowth lay crouched in lairs. But above the great calm of the earth, the heavens gave themselves over to fury. Thick black clouds billowed up over the horizon, rolled raggedly across the sky, goaded on by brilliant swords of lightning flashing out in a dozen places at once. The light of the day died to nothingness beneath the black clouds, reared up in spurting gleams as the lightning flashed. The thunder rolled fiercely and arrogantly along the valleys, up the roadway, through the trees, thunder of menace so that the winds ran before it in furious bursts of speed, dropping exhausted as the roar died to a mutter, only to roar out again, sending the winds screaming before it.

Then the rain fell in a deluge, filling the heavens, and thundering down to earth. There was no longer heaven or earth, they were hurled into primeval chaos, a great void of swirling water, of darkness, loud with the angry roar of the thunder. Somewhere in the void the trees shrank into thin lines. Somewhere the houses crouched low to the ground. Somewhere the rivers and the streams alone answered the challenge of the storm and raised up angry voices in reply.

For two or three hours the storm held sway then abruptly it was gone. The thunder ceased, the rain ceased, the winds died to a whisper; the rivers and the streams shouted still with angry voices but presently these dropped too to a murmur. The light returned and the green earth sighed again, sighed deeply, moved and swayed, momentarily drunken with the rains. The cautious inquiries of the birds, the questioning of the animals, and life stirred again, and moved and went its way.

So it was, day after day. The hillsides glowed with living green, the burden of the dust was lifted from the undergrowth. The river of Nyitso moved with increasing power and the water-courses of the fields came chatteringly to life.

It was the fourth of the months in the calendar. It was the third season of the year, the season of the great rains, and the first miracle of the year, the miracle of seed and soil and rain, when life begins again in the earth.

Nyitso observed the time in its own way. It was a sober time, as though the great cleansing of the earth was followed by a cleansing of the mind of man. They attired themselves in clean

clothes, some still with the newness on them, clothes bought with the cocoa crop; and gathered into the stone church, those who were faithful and those who defaulted readily and often, whether through disaster, disease or the madness of the Harmattan. It was not necessary now for puzzled minds to sort out old faiths from new, for here was something again which anyone could understand, a prayer to the God of Life, to give again the first miracle of the year, of life in the earth, and in time to give also the second miracle, the harvesting of life from the earth. They moved in procession to the farmlands and planted ceremoniously, with song, the first yams, in small mounds, mounds strangely reminiscent of the mounds of death, the death that precedes life.

Thereafter there was no time for ceremonies. The yams were planted, long rows of mounds, thickly strewn with leaves for protection against sudden changes of temperature. The maize was planted, and cassava; and cocoyams, and onions. The young trees were committed to the soil, banana trees in rows where the forest trees held back from them the power of winds; plantains, avocado pears, pawpaws, mangoes, and on the eastern slopes the lime trees where the winds reached them with only a whisper but the rising sun poured warmth into the fruits. All these plantings were perforce accomplished in their due season, for immediately thereafter came the next planting time, of rice and millet, and, down in the plains, of cotton and groundnuts.

This was the time when Seth showed at his best, his powerful form moving swiftly down the long rows, muscles rippling as his spade bit into the earth. Dema worked too, with an expression of happiness, for already she had forgotten the anger of the heat time. Secretly she was a little proud of his waywardness, of his prowess in conquest, especially now that it was all in abeyance in the busy time, so that he turned naturally to her alone.

There was abundance of water. The river flowed in splendid strength. The little cement wall, with its row of pipes, became a waterfall with water pouring glassily over it, the pipes lost somewhere below. Presently the wall, too, vanished beneath the surface and the river flowed over it, without even a ripple

to give recognition to its presence.

The water bore away sickness—the sickness of heat, dust, and dirt. There was cleanliness of bodies, of clothes, of living-places. The rains cleansed the roads, the open spaces, the ditches.

But the water also brought sickness—the sickness of damp soil in dark sleeping-places, the sickness that crept into the lungs and made people gasp and choke and cough and spit, so that presently they would sink down in apathy and exhaustion.

Then the fevers came, the shivering fever and the fever that turned the eyes to yellow pools. Fevers from weed-choked pools in undrained lands where the mosquito covered the surface, as the poison leaves covered the pools for the fish. This poison was for man.

Presently the old man died. The bell tolled for him as it tolled for many at this time, and the talking drums carried the message to the valley. The kinsfolk came up from the valley, trudging up in heavy rain, so that many might gather together and give to the old man a peaceful slumber. There was no money for a coffin. He lay upon a bier, wrapped in palm mats and they buried him gravely without sorrow. Why sorrow for an old man's body that has now followed after the mind which left it many months ago.

The kinsfolk came but Ama did not come. Paul wrote a second letter to her. This one he wrote easily, spurred on by unease, for the mother had had no word of her for a lengthening time. He wrote of the unease of all of them, and of the sadness of the old man's death. As he wrote he resolved that if no word came from Ama, he would go to the capital and seek her out. He would go soon. Nor did he know that he spoke prophetically.

There was another sickness in the land, one which did not itself reach the village where it lay high up in the hills on the pass. Neither was there mention of it in the newspapers that crashed daily on the little platform before the news-stall. Tidings came by word of mouth, the tidings brought by traders and bus drivers, and cattle-drovers. They spoke of strikes that turned swiftly to ugly riots, of riots that were quelled by ugly force. There were uglier things, arrests without due cause stated, confinements to underground prisons. They even told of a Cabinet Minister, who fled for his life, and from his hiding-

place still spat venom at his pursuers. They told of people who slipped quietly over the borders into territories where they could find anonymity. The rumours increased in number, they increased in gravity. No one could sift the truth from rumours. They spoke of opposition to the government. But how could that be, since meetings of the opposition party were under a police ban? They spoke of plots and subversion. But how could that be, since people were forbidden to gather together other than for obviously innocent purposes? The sickness did not reach Nyitso, but the rumours did, and, as Alale said often, 'A rumour, among my people, is truth'. That might well be but there was no certainty, and uncertainty breeds distrust and fear quicker than truth. Aku's ear was caught by a report of an incident in a church where a service was disrupted by the walking out of a large party of well-dressed representatives of the ruling party. They walked out in protest against the sermon, a sermon preached on the text, 'What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?' Aku's eyes gleamed as he related the story to Paul and Judge Wenya. They were sitting in Aku's house having a clarifying discussion of all the projects. Wenya looked sharply at him and Paul thought, 'Yes, he sees, as I see, that Aku will not shrink if danger comes. He will go out to meet it, perhaps unnecessarily.' He prayed suddenly in his mind for Aku, that he might know a long life and a peaceful death in old age.

Aloud he said, 'I wanted to know that everything here is in order, so that my presence becomes unnecessary. Unlike Aku, I prefer to fight and run away, so that I may live to fight another day.'

Wenya nodded his head thoughtfully. He said, 'I have heard many disquieting things. Not the least is the draining away of educated men who seek employment abroad. We can ill spare them. As the number of scapegoats lessens, so they must look for new ones—or old ones. So your danger grows, and it is better that you leave in good time. You will not forget us, and we shall not forget you. If we both work in our own way, in the manner that comes to hand, presently changes will come, must come.'

'Yes. Yes', interjected Aku energetically, 'If we lose both faith and charity, yet we can still cling to hope.'

Wenya said then, 'If you are in agreement then our plan will be to separate the Restaurant Fund and the Roofing Fund. Everything else will come under the heading of Nyitso Development. The restaurant will be, so to speak, the property of the women who made it possible, and who are still the creditors and the shareholders. The Roofing Fund will be the concern of lenders and borrowers. All other expenditure will be charged to Development, and all its profits will be available for further schemes. This will be the concern of the councillors. The bank is lending us two officers for a few days to put our books in order and with them we shall arrange payment of interest and repayment of loan out of the water rates we shall collect from all the villages who will be served by the reservoir, and if necessary by a special levy on cocoa loads. Thereafter, as you so correctly put it, we shall cling to hope.'

There was little more discussion of details and as each project in turn was mentioned, Paul found his mental vision turning to it, the road, the restaurant, the dance-floor, the buses, the news-stall, the reservoir, the school, even the promised petrol station and the possible day-nursery. All the parts of a plant that was growing from the fruit of the cocoa trees, growing from the soil of Nyitso, watered by its sweat, and by its tears too.

It was almost as though Wenya followed the movements of his mind as he created the picture. He said, 'We owe you a debt of gratitude. It was you who started it all.' But Paul shook his head, 'To your daughter, not to me', he said. 'I had the first idea but she had the courage to make it work. Ideas are plentiful in this land, they flower flamboyantly like true tropical flowers, and like them they wither soon and die. Those who have the courage to make the ideas work are few in number. Your daughter is of that number.' He was glad when Aku cried out, 'Hear. Hear!' doubly glad because he recollected Aku's earlier antagonism to Madam Rosalie. He said, 'Don't forget the scheme for growing pineapples for the factory. It might be worth trying.'

So that was that, and in a sense he had said his adieu. He could have gone then, there and then, except that the rain was pelting down outside and there was nothing anyone could do anywhere, except sit and wait in shelter, a fact which recurred daily, and

which halved the daily output of work on the reservoir, much to Herr Stüwe's consternation. The young man was learning the hard lessons of climate and the power of environment in the good school of experience.

Paul thought now of Aku's house, of the concrete slab which covered the bedrooms as ceiling and roof, and upon which other bedrooms had been destined to appear. Aku had long since forgotten about that. Paul said now, 'Aku, don't you think you should make a start on those upstairs bedrooms of yours?' and Aku rose to his feet as though pushed out of his chair by the sheer force of recollection. 'Good Heavens! Yes', he cried. 'I must set to work immediately.' But Paul touched his arm and said, 'Aku. It is raining now', and pointed upward.

Aku sat down again slowly, and said almost defensively, 'Well, we cannot be expected to build things in a storm'. His face brightened up again. He said, 'Really, it would be foolish even to think of it till the next dry season. Of course, quite foolish.' He dismissed again the entire matter from his mind, the flat, hopefully-waiting floor of concrete, the stacked roof-timbers, the neat piles of tiles.

Presently the rain died away, leaving a starlit sky of early evening. There was the stillness that always followed a storm, a stillness disturbed only by water-sounds, from the river and from the new streams. Soon other sounds would be heard but, for a while, the stillness reigned. It was just such a night as the one on which he had returned to the village. The lights were beginning to flicker through doorways and windows. He walked down the roadway some distance and then across the hillside to the river, aimlessly, breathing in the clean, rain-washed air. Then Fate did a strange thing to Paul. He hardly noticed the car at first, or rather he noticed it as a shape of greater darkness than the early darkness surrounding it, a strange new monster of the night that gradually took on the outline of a large car as he stared at it, a large dark car under the trees. He smiled. In Europe, of course, one would think immediately of courting couples. But this was not Europe and such habits—and such cars—had not yet reached the village in the hills. The smile faded with the recollected thought and he walked cautiously across to the car. The windows were turned slightly down and

on the back seat lay a man, in deep slumber, for he made no stir as Paul tried the locked doors and even tapped gently on the windows. He frowned thoughtfully. A stranger, coming openly to the village, would have gone openly to the village-authorities for accommodation, particularly a man such as this, in good clothes with a good car. Why edge one's car off the road under the trees? Another political suspect on the run. He must have travelled all day and now slumbered preparatory to some further journey in the shelter of the night.

He struck a match and in the short-lived light stared at the face of the man who slept in the back of the car. The light flickered out and died and he stood again in the darkness, in the complete stillness of shock, a stillness that opposed itself to a multitude of warring emotions that rose up and tumbled and tore through his mind as the storm winds tore through the forest. This was the face of Basu, the man whose deposition had closed the walls of political prison round him.

For a moment he was back in the state of blinding hate, hate of the foreigner who had stolen the land, hate of his own people who had raped the land, hate so fierce that it crept down into his fingers so that they wanted to curl about the man's throat and strangle him unto death, and he heard his voice whispering hoarsely, 'Basu! Basu!'

Then it was strange, as though in a very few moments he relived the last year, the entire year, in all its events and in all its emotions. The apathetic despair of prison life turned abruptly into the senseless frustrations of village life; the dam breaking and the huts sinking to their knees in the water; the woman lying lifeless from the blow of the pestle; the weariness unto death that filled him in the heat-time. But other things too; his own voice saying 'The toil shall be ours for we have the gift of toil, and the profits will be ours'; the courage of Madam Rosalie and the fearlessness of Aku; the voice of the village lifted in defiant song, 'Our home is in Nyitso, there it shall remain'; the peace of Ama's presence under the morning star; a man does not live through all these things without being drawn into the life that breathes in them.

The hate was gone. He felt curiously empty of hate, empty of all emotion save a great weariness with evil. His enemy was

delivered into his hand; there was revenge here for the taking, but he did not desire it. No question of high-sounding principles, no question of forgiveness. Simply he did not desire it. And perhaps a voice whispered, 'Let him live. Let him go on unhindered. Let him know what it is to see the barrier come down across the path, to have no real place of rest, to feel bewilderment, fear and frustration.' This man had crawled across his path like a slithering poisonous reptile. It had struck without killing. He had recovered, gone on his way, with his face to the rising sun. The reptile could stay where it belonged in the dust and debris of the undergrowth.

He was in command of himself now, maliciously in command, so that he rapped on the window, sharply this time, and called out, 'Basu, Basu!'

The man was on the run all right. Half-drugged in sleep, yet he jerked up in his seat and stared about him wildly. Paul said quietly, 'A peculiar place to sleep, Mr. Basu. Why do you not go to the village?' His tone must have reassured the man who came tumbling out of the car. He clutched at Paul's arm. He said hoarsely, 'You know me? Do not tell them, do not tell them. I have had to clear out. A political charge. I am ruined. I had to clear out, leave everything behind.' He was near to hysteria. Suddenly his own folly became apparent to him. He dropped his voice. It was too late to retract his words. He said instead 'Who are you? I can give you money.' He plucked feverishly at an inner pocket.

Paul said sombrely, 'Keep your money. I do not want it. I wanted only to know what you were doing here.'

Again the man said, 'Who are you?' and Paul countered, 'Do you know me?' Deliberately he struck another match and held it so that the light played over his own face, over his eyes. The man peered at him eagerly, but in bewilderment. He shook his head. 'No', he said, puzzled, 'I do not know you'. The match went out. Irony. The man who had ruined him did not even know him. Aloud he said, 'Why did you come this way?' Basu was feeling more confident. He said, 'I heard there was a good road this way'. Paul nearly laughed. Irony again. The road made good by his efforts, on his initiative, a smooth pathway for the enemy.

He felt no fear. The man might be armed, but he knew his people. Action on these occasions was abhorrent. Instead they loved words, to 'talk the case', to palaver for hours. Even a man on the run in fear of his very life would hesitate before swift, decisive action against a possible danger.

Now Paul said, 'I am, like you, a man who fears discovery'. Irony again. Almost they were partners.

Basu said, 'You can help me?' But Paul shook his head. He said, 'I shall not help you, I shall not hinder you. But that way is yours, and this way is mine.' He pointed, unthinkingly, across the plains and then to the valley. He turned and walked away, turned his back without fear. The man would not attack. Even now he would be climbing hastily back into the front seat, anxious to move out of a place grown inimical, to be on his way to whatever place he had in his mind, perhaps to the border, in his big fat car. Still, he needed the car, with all the load of guilt he had to carry. He found himself thinking that political troubles had caused quite a deal of activity in the vicinity of Nyitso lately. He found himself thinking, 'I hope the road can stand up to it'. That struck him as funny, so that he stopped in the half-darkness and threw back his head and laughed aloud.

It was such a night as the one on which he had returned to the village. The encounter made the memory more vivid, so that he saw himself trudging up the hillside in the storm, walking through the small house, holding a lamp above his head, placing his wet jacket across the back of the chair. So vivid, that for a moment it seemed that memory materialized into a figure who paced up and down the floor of the main room; there was again a wet jacket draped across the back of a chair.

But this was reality. The man stopped in his pacing and stared at him for a moment before he said, 'Yes. It is Mr. Saki. Do you remember me—John Owusu?' For a moment Paul gazed at him in return. Then he nodded. 'Yes, indeed', he said, 'I remember you very well, but you seem to have grown up suddenly.' Not so suddenly. He had seen the boy last, some time before he went to prison. Over three years ago. Now he was a young man with a face of anxiety. He said, 'There was no one here, so I took the liberty of entering. The rain was pouring down. Mr. Agyiri asked me to see you.'

Paul nodded again. He said, 'Come into the kitchen and have a cup of Nyitso Special—cocoa to you'. As the visitor took a chair, Paul busied himself at the tiny oil-stove. Some inner perception told him that the young man was the destined messenger, that his own time in Nyitso was ended, that the barrier was lifting, a hand indicating the way. Deliberately he delayed the message. He said, 'I hope your family news is good'. Owusu said. 'My father has gone abroad'. Paul turned slowly to face him. 'Why?' he asked. Owusu gestured with both hands, a spreading movement. He said, 'There were incidents at the college. The climax came on a speech day when the students grew unruly during certain speeches. They lined a pathway for certain of the guests and turned their backs. Next day there was hell let loose. A V.I.P. arrived to harangue the students, then harangue the staff. There were accusations and counter-accusations, and one way and another my father realized that his unpopularity in high places was evident. So he didn't wait for definite trouble—you know how things are. He made protestations of loyalty, resigned his job with declarations of shame at his failure, and quietly went abroad. Doing it that way brought no repercussions on the family. Our own plans at this stage are uncertain.'

'I see', said Paul. Commisseration was neither offered nor expected. He seated himself now and they drank the cocoa, and he waited for Reuben's message to be delivered. Although he knew what it would be, still the words brought a slight shock.

Owusu said, 'Mr. Agyiri says you must go. If you have not arrived at his office by tomorrow night, he intends to come up here to fetch you. But he doesn't want to do that, because he is often watched and questioned. He thinks it will be quite safe for you to come to the capital if you are unobtrusive. He says that you were not a public figure, in the accepted sense of the word, before your detention, and your stay in prison and here in the village have removed your face from people's minds. They will not readily recognize you. He can make satisfactory arrangements for the journey.'

Paul drank slowly and deliberately. The room was very dark. He said, 'Why the sudden urgency?'

Owusu's voice said softly, 'The house where you used to stay in the capital. The police have visited it, inquiring for you. Then

they went to Mercy Onyina. It seems they knew she had looked after your things. She was clever you know. She let them search your things—they found nothing of course, and then she told them you had gone to Kumasi. I think that was clever. Had she said you'd gone to the western areas, they would probably have thought to look east and sooner or later have unearthed you here. But Kumasi. Well, it's a big place, and the sort of place where you expect ex-detainees to go, the climate is more suitable.' He laughed briefly, then said, 'Even so, it's only a matter of time'.

Paul rose to light the small lamp that hung above the table. In the flickering light the details of the room grew clear and important, the way they do when departure is imminent. He said, 'I shall see Reuben tomorrow'.

'Good'. The other rose to his feet. 'I must get on now, Mr. Saki, I'm going up to the border, to Shia, to collect the refugee mail.'

Paul said 'What!' in genuine amazement.

Owusu laughed at his expression. He said, 'Oh, it's quite simple, if you ride it calmly. Shia is notorious for smugglers. The police raid there regularly. So when the "mail" is ready, a small party brings it through, together with some contraband, brandy, shoes, West African francs, and so on. One of them acts suspiciously, attracts the attention of the police, there is an attempt to run away, a swoop by the police, general outcry, and pushing and shoving, and in the midst of it all, the "mail" is passed over. Then the "smugglers" scamper off. One or two of them have been caught and fined for smuggling. But that's the luck of the game.' He added lightly, 'It's a bit annoying for the real smugglers, of course'.

They went outside and up the roadway a little distance to where a car was parked. Paul watched his young visitor drive off and he thought of Rudy's words of so long ago. 'You black chaps have no nervous systems at all.' How much had happened since then. He had known hate, bewilderment and fear, and in the village he had known fierce loyalty and great compassion.

He went back into the house and said aloud, 'Now what do I wear?' That struck him as funny and he laughed, a queer sound in the empty house. The kente was no good. He didn't wear it often enough. Draw attention by a regal appearance and even

more by betraying clumsiness. Tunic? No, a little too countrified. Eventually he dressed in the jacket and slacks in which he had returned to Nyitso. They looked more worn now. That was all to the good. One shouldn't be too neat, or too quiet. A vivid scarf knotted round his throat, and a hat, yes, pushed well to the back of his head, and there he was, one of the vast majority in the capital, a chap who sometimes had a job, not much money, but casual and carefree, a bit untidy. He could almost feel subtle psychological adjustments to the new personality. Come to think of it it was fundamentally similar to his own.

After the evening meal he said to Aku and Alale, 'I am going to the capital, but I shall return before I leave the country'. Alale asked, 'Is there not danger in running about like that?' and there was no laughter in her eyes. He said, 'Less, I think, than in remaining still, now'. Aku said, 'I saw a car drive off. Was there a message?' Paul nodded, 'Yes, there was a message'.

Quite soon he left them and set off down the long hillside. He intended walking a good way along the valley, then curling up for a few hours' sleep on the verandah of a trading store. Before dawn he would continue on his way and board the first bus that overtook him.

He was fortunate. Four o'clock—when the sky was still dark and Nyitso was beginning its day—saw him waving down a bus that purred up out of the darkness behind two gleaming beams of light. The bus was 'God and Chickenfeed', and another passenger climbed in after him and settled himself next to Paul with a sigh of relief. He said, 'I've come from there', waving his hand back in the direction of the higher hills. The man said, 'Oh, there? Quiet up there, I suppose?' 'Not at all', said Paul calmly, 'We are building a reservoir. By next dry season every house in the village will have ample water, cool, clean water pumped up from the earth. Also, we have one hundred per cent school registration.' The man relapsed into impressed silence and Paul settled himself comfortably against the window and slept. But before he slept he remembered that strong feeling of approaching change, approaching event, remembered how he had stood listening in silence, as though this last event might give a sigh of warning. He remembered Basu. Had this been the awaited event? What an anticlimax! He smiled wryly and slept.

He was awakened by the slowing down of the vehicle, as 'God and Chickenfeed' turned to move across the Volta-Adomi bridge, then halted at the toll-barrier, bowing to progress and inevitability. The shining spider-web hovered in the early light. Below, the great river sang with a voice strengthened by the rains.

Suddenly Paul was filled with exhilaration, a great suffusing soaring elation that threatened to lift him right out of his seat. A year ago he had passed this way, a political ex-detainee, a forgotten journalist, a man filled with frightened bitterness, with malevolence, almost with despair. But he had triumphed over it all, snatched victory from defeat. The village which lay in the day before yesterday, the village which was to mean nothing to him, it had taken him up into the very life that breathed in it, and he in return had taken it into his hands, worked for it, sweated for it, moulded it, practically re-created it. He saw Akaga running down the hillside, jumping in the very path of the water, calling out the warning to those below, he saw the restrained excitement in Madam Rosalie's eyes, 'I can see my day-nursery growing up before my eyes'. He saw Seth standing commandingly before the sickness-dancers pointing down the road, saying, 'Go now, go in peace'.

Voices, yes. Wenya's voice. 'We should send you forth as our unofficial ambassador.'

He smiled widely with the elation. Nyitso. The day after tomorrow. Yes.

He watched the driver pay the toll. The barrier was slowly raised, just as the barrier to freedom before him was rising too. He forgot about the toll.

❧ 18 ❧

Then he was back in the capital, where the pedestrians sang and talked and shouted above the roar of the traffic; and the taxis, flashing their yellow mudguards in the strong light, looked more than ever like leaping locusts.

He entered the bank and passed down the shorter length of the counter till he reached the accountant's office. Mr. Fairfax was seated at his desk. He looked up at him without greeting, almost as though he were expecting him, and his hand smoothed the fair moustache. Paul sat down opposite him. He said quietly, 'Has anybody been inquiring about me?' Mr. Fairfax leaned back in his chair, dangerously far. His light blue eyes were fixed on the strip of light blue sky visible through the high window. He said, 'Oh, yes, indeed. Some police officers. Asked whether you had an account here. Naturally I told them that customers' affairs are confidential, but there seemed no harm in mentioning that you used to have a current account with us but it was closed at the time you—ah.'

'At the time I went to prison', said Paul patiently. 'I take it you didn't mention that I'd simultaneously opened a savings account?'

Mr. Fairfax looked quite shocked. He said, 'Mr. Saki, please, our customers' affairs are confidential. I take it you received the notifications of deposits made by the newspaper.'

Then Paul told him in a few words about Little Mother and her three small children and arranged that every month the bank would send to her a small sum, a very small sum, but very large by Little Mother's standards. He said, 'It will be a long time before the money is used up. By then I hope I shall have made more, elsewhere. Perhaps I shall even be able to come home again.'

There were a few moments of completely impersonal discus-

sion but as Paul left the office, Mr. Fairfax murmured, rather vaguely, 'All the same—better make plans—matter of time you know'.

Paul grinned as he left the bank. He said to himself, 'Rudy! One day you must meet Mr. Fairfax'. He felt jubilant; the net was being thrown, but he would swim out from under it with ease. These police weren't very smart. Last time he had been overwhelmed by surprise. He had participated in no subversive activities, no plots, real or apocryphal. He had hovered on the fringe of other people's political thought, hovered in his capacity as finder and vendor of news and views. The net had caught him.

This time he was ready for anything, capable of anything. This time he knew that scapegoats were just as good a catch as plotters. Numbers lent an air of verisimilitude to unconvincing allegations. He could scamper across the border as others had done, but he preferred Reuben's way, to go openly and brazenly.

Reuben sprang to his feet when he saw him, but not to greet him. Instead he rushed over to the water carafe on a filing cabinet, filled a glass and drained it noisily. 'You'll be the death of me, Paul', he moaned. 'Why didn't you clear out ages ago? I'm a simple man, a quiet man, I tell you, and here I am, the centre of intrigue, mystery. Espionage is all that's missing. Travel documents all over the place.'

'Forged?' asked Paul with interest.

'Certainly not', said Reuben indignantly. 'Real papers for real people, real sureties, real details, real documents, everything real, including the money that changed hands to get them. Of course, the real people sit quietly in their villages, blissfully unaware of the fact that they are engaged in travelling about. But that's beside the point. It's not my fault if government departments accept money, and no questions asked. Corruption, that's what it is, corruption. Everywhere. Sickening.'

He was as fat as ever, but there was a new frown between his eyes. The handkerchief this morning was bright magenta. Paul felt again the happy feeling of irresponsibility that Reuben's presence always engendered. He said, 'What's the procedure in my case?'

Reuben said, 'Seeing the police are looking for you, do it in two steps. A plane to a near-by territory with someone else's

passport, to attend a conference. Any conference. There's always one on somewhere. A penny for every cubic foot of hot air being generated in Africa today and I'd be a millionaire. From there on an international line, using your own passport.'

Paul said, 'Any chance of taking a wife, and child?'

Reuben grumbled to himself. 'I guess so', he said at last. Then he said suspiciously, 'Paul, you haven't got a wife'.

'I might have by the time I go', said Paul.

'And a child too', said Reuben. 'It's that Nyitso air. It still takes nine months down here.' He mopped his brow and said, 'I figured you'd leave at once. Just when do you figure to go? I'll give you three days, three days, that's all.'

Paul said, 'Give me a week, Reuben. I'll be back here in this very office in a week's time.'

As he turned to go, Reuben clutched suddenly at the lapels of his jacket. He said, 'Paul, I can't stand the worry. I've got to get you out of the country, out of my system. Heaven knows—I'm a quiet, peace-loving man of simple tastes. Why do you need a week to fetch a wife?'

Paul edged out from his grasp. He said, 'I've still got to find her'.

With that he was gone, and Reuben stared after him with an expression in which bewilderment and woe were strangely mixed.

❧ 19 ❧

It was a question of finding her, and she had to be found quickly. For a moment Paul paused outside Reuben's office to get his bearings. He felt ridiculously carefree. Find Ama, fetch Togbe, and away—not like a political suspect on the run, but like a family man setting out on a carefree, well-earned holiday. Strange. Until that morning he had no thought of marrying Ama. Yet when he expressed the thought, it was like an old friend, waiting patiently at the back of his mind, to be recognized. Ama would recognize it too, of course, immediately.

He pushed his hat even farther back on his head and whistled. He set off at a brisk walk. He would go to the address from which her letters had been written. If she had left there, they could surely tell him where she had gone. He had a feeling that she had left.

The house was not difficult to find. It was a poor quarter of the town but still reasonably presentable. The woman who opened the door to him was pleasant-faced, and her eyes grew round as he asked for Ama. Ama had left three weeks ago. Oh, definitely some weeks ago, because in the meantime she had been away herself for three weeks. It was unfortunate about the first letter. It came the very day she left and nobody had done anything about it. She found it on her return and just after that another letter came. She sent them off together; her second son took them; he walked with them to her cousin's house, where Ama had gone, right across town. He detected a note of grievance at this point. He said, 'Did your son find Ama there?'

She paused for a moment, looking annoyed. She said, 'No, he didn't see Ama, but then it was the daytime so she was probably at work. He just left the letters with my cousin.' The cause of the annoyance now emerged. She said, 'She was drunk again. So he just left the letters and came away. We haven't seen any

of them since then.'

For the first time that day, Paul felt a coldness pass through him. He said, 'Why did she go to your cousin's home?'

The woman looked surprised, as though he should know the answer. She said, 'Why, to be near the hospital. She was to have some treatment.'

'Was she ill?' he persisted.

The woman nodded, still surprised. She said, 'You know, the coughing sickness. She was to have some treatment. I don't think they had a bed for her yet. So she went to my cousin's house. It's not far from the hospital.' She paused for a while, then said, 'It's not a nice house, you know, my cousin drinks every penny she can lay her hands on. Ama knew, but she didn't seem to care. I wonder why she didn't write to her family. She wrote from here, I know.'

Paul took his leave. The coldness was more intense now, the coldness inside him, and, as if to match it, the darkening clouds were appearing in the sky, and sharp gusts of wind tore along the streets, gathering up handfuls of papers and rags and scattering them again. The coughing sickness. He remembered incidents now, when she built the fence, when she danced. The coughing sickness. She was very ill. He knew that with a cold certainty for he knew Ama; quite suddenly he knew her very well indeed, could look into her head, read her thoughts. That was why she had not written again to her family. Her thoughts moved in response to instincts, not to reason. Reason was like imagination, epiphytic. It didn't like close contact with the soil. That was where instincts thrived, the instincts of animals, of sick animals, who curled up alone in a lair, to die. But his letters had reached her, they should have taken the place of reason, should have called her back home, out of the lair. His thoughts whirled and jarred and screamed, like the tyres of the taxi that was bearing him across the town. There were wild bursts of speed and crazy careerings round corners, followed by long sickening minutes in streets jammed to a standstill with every possible size and age of vehicle, the pavements equally jammed with stalls and loungers and the overflow of stock from the little shops. Far away, the chest hospital stood primly cream-washed amid dishevelled surroundings. He caught glimpses of it every

now and again, and presently whirled right past the entrance. Three streets farther on the driver dropped him.

He gazed about him for a moment. It was a squalid area of tiny shacks lining a narrow street, with deep, open drains, still choked here and there with the debris of the dry season. The rains had already begun their work. A few more storms and the drains would be clean. A pity the rain couldn't take away the pile of refuse at the end of the street. It lay there in the darkening light, a forlorn comment on progress, a heap of papers, rags, rusty tins, orange peels. The stench was horrible. He went down the street to the house he sought, and knocked loudly on the door.

This was the woman all right. She was pretty drunk now. She leaned against the door jamb and breathed heavily till the air seemed opaque with the fumes of palm-wine. At Ama's name she grew strident. It was not *her* fault if the girl cleared out of the hospital. She went up in all innocence to see her cousin and the hospital people abused her. Yes, asked her where Ama had gone, and why, and what she had to do with it. As if she had anything to do with it. Not that she blamed Ama for clearing out of the hospital; any self-respecting person would clear out of a place like that. The time before they had abused her too, told her she was drunk and unfit to be in the wards, when she had gone up in all kindness, to take Ama her letters. And when she went up a few days later, to see if Ama had got the letters all right, they abused her, because Ama had cleared out.

Paul stood quietly in the doorway. He had no wish to antagonize the woman. She was a stepping-stone and the river was rising. When she paused, he asked, 'Do you know when she left the hospital?' She thought for a moment and then said, 'Three days ago. Yes.'

He was startled into exclamation. 'Three days. She's had time to reach home, ample time. Where has she gone?' The woman was shrill again. 'Ask me', she said. 'She comes here because she's sick, then she goes to the hospital, then she clears out. How do I know where she's gone.'

He said bitterly, 'She was sick. Don't you care for the girl at all?' The woman slumped into a more leaning position than before. Her face was sulky. She said, 'Sure I care, Mister, I care for

everyone in this house, every living soul. There's twenty of them.'

He went away then. The woman was half-drunk. Perhaps the hospital could tell him more. He walked swiftly back past the three streets and up the steps. As he mounted them, the storm broke. The rain crashed down with angry vehemence; in a moment the deep drains were gurgling streams of water. The rain danced back from the steaming earth in a fine, strong spray.

The receptionist at the inquiry counter gave him a startled look at Ama's name and said, 'Wait a moment, please'. She disappeared through a door and there was some little delay before the door opened again and she returned. There was a doctor with her, a white man.

But he was just as disappointed in Paul as Paul was in him. 'I hoped you'd brought word of her', he said. He clasped his arms, rocking backwards and forwards on his heels. 'All I know is that she received some letters, and next morning she had gone. She was here only a short while, we hadn't a bed before then. I believe the woman she stayed with came up but didn't know anything about her going, or her present whereabouts. I was disappointed. I thought she'd have gone home to her. But it seems now she really comes from your village.'

'You think she's gone home', said Paul slowly.

The doctor was standing by the window, looking out as the rain beat fiercely down on the earth. His fingers drummed lightly on the sill. He said, 'Probably. They often do you know. I think they grow afraid. The cleanliness, the orderliness, the impersonality of a hospital, it frightens them. They stand it for a while then off they go. The last thing we want, of course, taking communicable diseases all over the country. Too many people to a room, and shutters closed and little knowledge of personal hygiene. What surprises me is that there is not a great deal more disease than there is. But you know what these people are, suspicious of any change. Until somebody knocks all this tradition and custom and superstition out of their heads, they'll never get anywhere.'

Paul nodded. Responding to his bearing and accent, the doctor seemed to have forgotten that he too was one of 'these people'. He felt no resentment about the criticism. It was true, valid;

and he had a sudden vision of Ama walking up the roadway bearing on her head a load, a tremendous load of the stupidity, greed, and disease of centuries. Ama was stumbling under the load now, stumbling dreadfully. He must reach her before she fell to the ground. He said, 'Tell me, is she very ill?'

The doctor looked at him sharply. He said, 'This is no time for beating about the bush. That girl is *gravely* ill.'

Then Paul was standing again on the steps of the hospital, turning his collar up against the rain and pulling his hat forward. Ama had gone home. Of that he felt quite certain. Yet he was unwilling to leave the capital immediately and blindly, for she had not reached home. Something may have happened on the way. It would be better if he could pick up a trail. But she had gone home. He was certain of that. His letters had called her out of the lair, the clean, white lair of the impersonal hospital.

If any observers had traced Paul's movements over the city during the rest of the day, they would have drawn a strange spider-web pattern, apparently without order. But his plan was orderly enough. There were places where a girl, sick to fainting, should have been taken; there were other places where she might have been taken. It would not be an exaggeration to say that he knew them all. Journalists have this much in common with priests—they find themselves in strange places. He even included police stations in his search. No one at any of them gave a sign of recognition; his hat was soaked and his clothes dishevelled from the rain, which had stopped now, leaving heat and smells rising from the ground. In other places there was startled recognition from people who thought him dead, from others who thought him still in prison. They were helpful, but he made no progress. Many times he suspended his inquiries in other directions and returned to the station from where the buses pulled out for journeys to the south-east. Each time there were fresh arrivals among the drivers. Each time he found no certain information.

It was after midnight before he stopped at a trading stall near the bus station. In the flickering light of a tiny lamp a stout, lugubrious woman served him some coffee, and some little sweet cakes. He was weary now, and the cold feeling of fear was strong in the darkness. He sat on the pavement, leaning against a

wall and rested, while he ate and drank. Presently another bus came in. It was called 'One Shilling'. He got up and walked across.

Luck was with him at last. The driver turned from an engrossing inspection of the engine and eyed him with interest. 'You mean the girl from Nyitso?' he said. Paul's heart pounded. He said, 'Do you know her?' 'Sure', the driver answered. 'I knew her at once. She used to live in Nyitso and work in the Peki valley. You get to know people when they often do the same journey. Very thin. She had the coughing sickness.'

Paul nodded with a feeling of bitterness. Even a casual stranger had known what he had failed to know. But his mind fastened on the 'I knew her at once'. He said, 'When did she travel from here?' The driver considered a while. He ticked off imaginary items on his fingers. At length he said, 'It was quite late in the morning. I was late that morning. It was three days ago, no, four because we are past midnight.'

Relief made Paul feel strangely sick. He said, 'Did she leave the bus at the bridge?' 'No, no', said the driver. 'I went straight through, across the bridge. She got off after that. I noticed because I wondered why she wasn't going on, to Peki, or to Nyitso. She got off at Ta-koli, you know where there is that big rock that looks like a man's head.'

'Ta-koli', said Paul puzzled. 'That is still about forty miles from Nyitso'.

The driver hunched up his shoulders. He said, 'Maybe she went to the herbalist there. She was looking very sick.'

Once again it seemed that Paul could look into Ama's thoughts. He said, 'No. I think she went to Ta-koli because that was as far as her money would take her. I think she has walked from there.' And once again he had that dreadful vision of Ama, stumbling under the load, walking slowly along the grey highway while all about her the green vegetation reared up into a menacing wave that might crash down at any moment. Now the angry sun burning down on her, and now the furious rains clawing. He said, 'What time do you set out?' The driver said, 'Four o'clock. I'm sleeping here. You can stay if you're going with me.'

He slammed down the bonnet and after some other ministrations

tions to 'One Shilling' he climbed up the stairs and stretched out along one of the seats. Paul followed and presently dropped into the sleep of exhaustion.

He was awakened by the movements of the driver as the latter stretched and yawned. In the darkness they both climbed down from the bus. The woman of the night before had vanished but there was another woman presiding over a food-stall. They ate and drank sombrely in the pre-dawn darkness while passengers began to arrive, piling their bundles on top, and seating themselves heavily in the bus.

Then 'One Shilling' was moving in the darkness, through the dimly lighted streets, down towards the sea where a small lagoon lay glassily beneath a long motor bridge and the headlights cut along it like knives.

Somewhere ahead lay the green glory of the plains. Paul slumped down in the corner of the seat and slept again.

But after the crossing of the river he was wide awake. The sun was still hidden behind thick mist but its strength was evident. The road curved through the folds of the green-clad hills, past the red-brown villages and the little graveyards where the pathetic brightness of the canna-lilies relieved the starkness of the swept earth. At Ta-koli he swung down from the bus and stood watching it as it drew away, disappearing down the road.

All that day he moved from village to village sometimes travelling a short distance by bus, sometimes walking along the grey road that shimmered in the midday heat, sometimes waving down a lorry for a lift. With varying degrees of success he followed Ama's path. There were people who remembered her quite distinctly, others who shook their heads blankly. But each time he grew worried at the loss of the trail, he picked it up again. There she had bought a few pence worth of kenkey rolls, there she had begged a drink of water. One man remembered a girl, curled up to sleep on the verandah of the U.A.C. store. He had seen her as she awakened. She had set off walking straight away. He indicated the verandah concerned.

Ama was going home. He could go ahead and wait for her there. But somehow he could not do this. She might be still somewhere along the highway, walking slowly and painfully under that great burden, the centuries of stupidity, greed, and

disease, while inside her, her own life wavered under the onslaught of a dreadful consuming sickness, so that Ama was just a shell, a thin, tremulous, empty shell, tortured in turn by the angry sun and by fierce rain-storms, both ignorant of her very existence, both uncaring. He began to hate the arrogant power of the sun and the furious force of the rains. Sun in the mornings, rain in the afternoons. It was raining now, a deluge falling out of the heavens, so that he trudged on blindly.

Presently it ceased and the clouds drew back and the late afternoon sun returned to swim among the clouds over the rain-drenched earth.

Ama became the mockery of all his work and all his hopes. Everything he had done for the village, how had it benefited Ama? For that matter, how had it benefited Nyitso? Oh, yes, by the next dry season, the water would be bubbling cleanly into all the homes in Nyitso, perhaps even for twenty-four hours a day. Yet the water-table of the whole land was dropping dangerously. Grandiose schemes of sugar refineries and so on, abandoned for lack of water. Yet here he was, still dripping wet from the abundant rain that had fallen in a matter of hours. Where did it go? The catchment areas were being ruined, whole areas deforested; disastrous grass-burning, like other evil habits from the past, menacing the hopes of the future. That doctor was right. Until you knocked all the tradition and custom and superstition out of their heads, they'd never get anywhere. The thought of the doctor brought back the vision of Ama, so that Ama somehow became the embodiment of the land. So Paul walked the Via Dolorosa. For some it is a long sorrow, and for others a brief anguish. For Paul it was a trudging walk along a new highway through an old land, with despair in his heart for one thin girl.

As the sun sank behind the hills, he reached the end of the Peki valley. He had lost the trail about half-way along the valley. She must be home. Or, if not, she had taken shelter in one of the last villages. He decided then to go to Nyitso and see if she had reached it, before returning to the valley to seek her. There was a bus coming along the valley now. He waited for it, climbed aboard and was borne swiftly out of the valley, and up the long, rising ground to the pass. It was not far from Nyitso when he

saw Ama. She stopped a moment to watch the bus pass by and turned her face fully to him so that she seemed to stare at him.

He jumped up then, pushed his way to the front and shook the driver fiercely by the shoulder to stop, then, as the bus slowed down, he jumped out, stumbled a step or two, and then ran down the sloping ground. Ama saw him coming. She made no attempt to move towards him, just stood wearily at the side of the road as though in seeing him her journey had ended and now there was no need to move. Then suddenly she sank down on the bank at the side of the road, and rested against a tree trunk while Paul stood before her in the drying mud of the roadway and all he could say was 'Ama! Ama!'.

The skin of her face was shrunken and withered. It was the face of an old woman. The skin was leaden-looking, dead-looking. All that was left of her life was in her eyes, eyes that now looked enormously large in the shrunken face, yet glittered with a peculiar life of their own. For some of her life still lay in her will, the will that had taken her out of the hospital, sat by her side for the long bus ride, then walked ahead of her beckoningly on the long weary walk after the ride had finished, after the money had finished.

She said then, very slowly, and her voice seemed shrunken too, 'Paul, before your father died, there was a bench along the side of your fence, where the people could rest when they came from the farmlands. There was a bench, and over it a shelter with the loufah creeper growing. It was cool in the shade and the flowers were beautiful.'

He picked her up then and there was nothing but lightness in his arms as he carried her up the hill, into his house, and placed her upon his bed. She lay quietly a while, then she spoke again to him, in a voice that was weary yet still held the little sounds of excitement that had once filled it. She said, 'Paul—the white doctor—he read the story in the paper about the dying chief—I kept the paper on my bed—I knew it was your story. I asked him if he liked it. He said, "It's excellent, excellent. This man is a poet." That is what you are, Paul, a poet; I felt so proud.'

He left her then, and ran across to tell Alale and then down the road and along the bush path to the hut, where Little Mother stared at him, her body tense and taut under the

swaying cloth, and she followed him as he returned, her bare feet going pad-pad-pad on the earth of the path.

As he reached his house, he saw Madam Rosalie's little car set off down the hillside, and Alale said, 'She has gone to find a doctor'. Her eyes added, 'But I do not think it is any use'. He sat by Ama's bed then while Alale moved about the kitchen where she was making a hot drink, and Little Mother crouched at the foot of the bed, like a frightened animal who senses tragedy in the air round it, but has not the ability to seek to understand it. Ama stared at her fixedly for a while, and then she whispered. 'Togbe, Togbe.' And Paul knew that it was not that Ama wished for Togbe's presence, but that she was fearful of what lay ahead for Togbe. He remembered then how he had planned to set off abroad, the three of them together, planned to marry Ama who of course would agree instantly. He said to her, 'Ama, I would like to marry you', and she frowned at him for a long time before she said, 'It is late, Paul', in a voice that was growing weaker. But now he became filled with a powerful wish that she should marry him, a desire so far removed from any earthly desire that it seemed to dissolve the walls about them and lift them up out of the small room, out of Nyitso, above the burdened land, into a place apart, where there was only Ama and himself and a sense of strange holiness; as though everything he had suffered and learned and endured all came together into this thin dying frame, and he must link it to himself with a mystic bond, a bond that would endure beyond life and death into eternity.

Aku was in the room then, and Alale, and Little Mother, still crouching tensely. He took Ama's hands in his, and he said, 'Look, Ama. These are the witnesses to our marriage. For now you are my wife and I am your husband.' Ama said only 'Yes', but her eyes smiled and presently her lips too. The mother made no movement, but Aku made a little clucking sound. He stared at Paul, afraid, as though he thought Paul might be seized by the sickness of madness. Alale's eyes were not afraid but thoughtful; they said, 'My cousin Paul walks in strange countries, yet still he is my cousin Paul'. He found comfort in Alale's eyes and he said to Ama. 'You are my wife, and your family is my family. The mother is my mother, and Togbe is

my own brother. The little ones, too, are my sister and my brothers. When my sister is fine and tall, she will go to the dance, and I will buy her a fine dress, not just for one dance, but for every dance, the whole night.' Ama smiled then. She said, 'A blue dress, Paul', and her voice was louder, with the little note of excitement again.

Madam Rosalie returned with the doctor. He was a white man, speaking good English but with a heavy accent they did not know, a very big, burly man, with rather prominent blue eyes. He was for a long time in the sick-room and when he came out he stood in the doorway of the front room and stared at them as they all stood in a row. Presently he said to Aku, 'Are you her father?' But before Aku could reply Paul said, 'I am her husband'. The doctor said, 'Oh', and looked coldly at him as though he judged him hardly. But that did not matter, for in a sense the judgement was just. He said, 'I have done what little I can. The heart is giving out rapidly. I shall come again in the morning.' With that he was gone.

Before the doctor came again, Ama was dead. She died at the third hour, while Nyitso was still asleep, wrapped in the silence and majesty of the night, while a glowing star moved slowly over into the western sky above the strip of road. Her gaze grew dim, and her face softened down into the appearance of youth. Paul sat in a dreadful stillness while the mother moved forward tensely and quietly and closed the eyes and laid the hands together on the cloth. So they stayed there, the three of them, in silence, till slowly the sounds of Nyitso began to fill the air. The birds of tree and compound called out cautiously then confidently; the sheep and the goats conversed hoarsely; there was the thin, splintering sound of riven wood, and the dancing of maize in the wire trays. Voices floated on the breeze. 'Greetings, my friend, what news of your household?' 'Thank you, the news is good. What news of your household?'

Presently, Alale placed her hand on his shoulder and Paul went out into the morning light, to the carpenter's yard, where already there were the first stirrings of activity for the day. The carpenter knew why he had come because the story had run ahead on little feet, pattering all round the village, and whispering at the windows. Paul said, 'A coffin for my wife', and the

carpenter chose one from a stack and edged it slowly free of the others. He said curiously, 'You did not marry her in the church?' and Paul said 'No'.

The carpenter took the money and gave the change. He dusted and polished the coffin nicely with a large cloth till the timber glowed and the glass of the little windows gleamed. He was still curious. He said, 'By what custom did you marry her?' Paul said sharply, 'By the custom of God'. He took the coffin on his shoulder and went back to the house.

In the afternoon, after the storm had spent itself, they buried Ama in the strange old graveyard which was like a living green cathedral amidst the slim trees soaring upward to a roof of leaves that dropped moisture on them from the rain, a fine mist. They stepped over the mounds and the great, tangled roots, and the sound of mourning rose into the air. Each one brought a cloth, a token of presence at the mourning, a farewell from the living to the dead.

That night Paul sat in his house and he sat very still, the better to quieten the sea of sorrow that raged inside him and threatened at times to overwhelm him. Presently Aku came, and Alale too, and then Madam Rosalie. When she came in, Alale looked at her and then at Aku and her eyes said to Aku, 'I am glad she is here, for she understands our cousin Paul in a manner which we cannot grasp. For she too walks in strange countries.'

Then Paul said to all of them, 'When I have left Nyitso, tell the mother to bring her children to my house. This will be their house now.'

Aku said, 'You will go tomorrow?' and Paul said 'Yes'. Then Alale said, 'There is no danger?' and he said, 'No. There is no danger now.' That was something he knew. Very well indeed. There is no danger at the beginning of a journey, when a man sets out to begin his life. The toll has been paid, and the barrier is raised.

Madam Rosalie said nothing at all, but she knew exactly what he meant and somehow, for a few minutes, they walked in strange countries together.

Then, in the silence, Aku said, quite fiercely. 'You will write again, Paul, for you are a clever writer. You will interpret your people.'

THE TIME OF FULFILMENT

Paul said bitterly, 'To the world?'
Aku shook his head. 'No', he said gravely, 'to themselves'.
Then Paul rose suddenly and picked up his journal. But he set it down not before Aku but before Madam Rosalie. He cried out, 'Oh, yes, I am a very clever writer, a very clever writer. See this journal. In here you will find a love story, a sad, quiet love story, with not a single word of love.'

❖ 20 ❖

But Paul delayed the departure for yet another day, even though Togbe's clothes were all neatly packed in a little bundle for the journey. There was no rush. There were plenty of days before Reuben would grow worried. So what was one day more in the village? He put on Aku's country shorts and took his machete and went out to labour in the forest and in the sun, cutting good stakes and bamboo and lengths of liana rope, and he carried them back to his house, with Togbe trotting anxiously at his side, like a small shadow.

He worked hard in the sun, making a bench along the side of the fence, a bench where the people could rest when they came back tired from the farmlands, or from the long walk up from the valley. Then he made a shelter over the bench, good stakes holding a roof of criss-crossed bamboo which let the sunlight down to the ground in little squares. Last of all he planted the loufah creeper. It was the right time, when the great rains would nourish it so that by the next dry season it would be thick and strong, with the long green fruits dropping from the criss-cross roof, or the bright yellow flowers dazzling one with their rich colour.

He worked hard in the sun and the sweat ran in little streams. There was anguish in him so that sometimes tears came from his eyes and joined the sweat. As he worked, sometimes the anguish would turn to a kind of despair so that he would pray loudly inside him to God for a sign, a sign that he was not forgotten, that his coming here had meant something to someone, to anyone, for somehow he could not think of what he had done, but his brain became crowded with things he had not done, Afua's son for instance; he had meant to do something about Afua's son.

So he prayed desperately for a sign. It was a ridiculous prayer,

as so many prayers are. But sometimes they are answered, in ridiculous ways.

There was a bus coming up the hill. It was a new bus. The engine was young and strong, rejoicing in its strength, as it purred up the hill. Paul kept his back to the road, but the bus stopped right opposite him. A voice called out, 'Hi, Mr. Saki, friend'. He turned then and saw Driver Joe, seated proudly at the wheel of the new bus, a splendid bus in a rich purple colour, with silvery lights as the sun's rays ran along the chromium.

Paul walked out into the roadway. The passengers stared at him without interest. He did not bother to wipe away the tears. They were lost in the sweat. He banged the side of the bus with the flat of his hand and he said quietly, 'From the profits'.

Driver Joe grinned and nodded.. 'From the profits', he said, 'and from the regular journeys, and from the sales commission. My old mother goes to the market place quite often now, with money in her hand. Any time you want a free ride, Mr. Saki, let me know.'

Paul nodded. He said, 'Tomorrow—for my brother and myself', and he glanced at the bank where Togbe was standing, watching anxiously.

Driver Joe said, 'I've come a long journey since the night we met, haven't I?'

Paul walked right round the bus, and when he passed the front he stepped back in the road to look up at the name, where shining, silvery letters bore a message, for all to see, and for him alone to see, for Paul had also had a long journey, since the night they met, a long journey from the prison, and in its way a wonderful journey,

'By Way of Nyitso'.

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